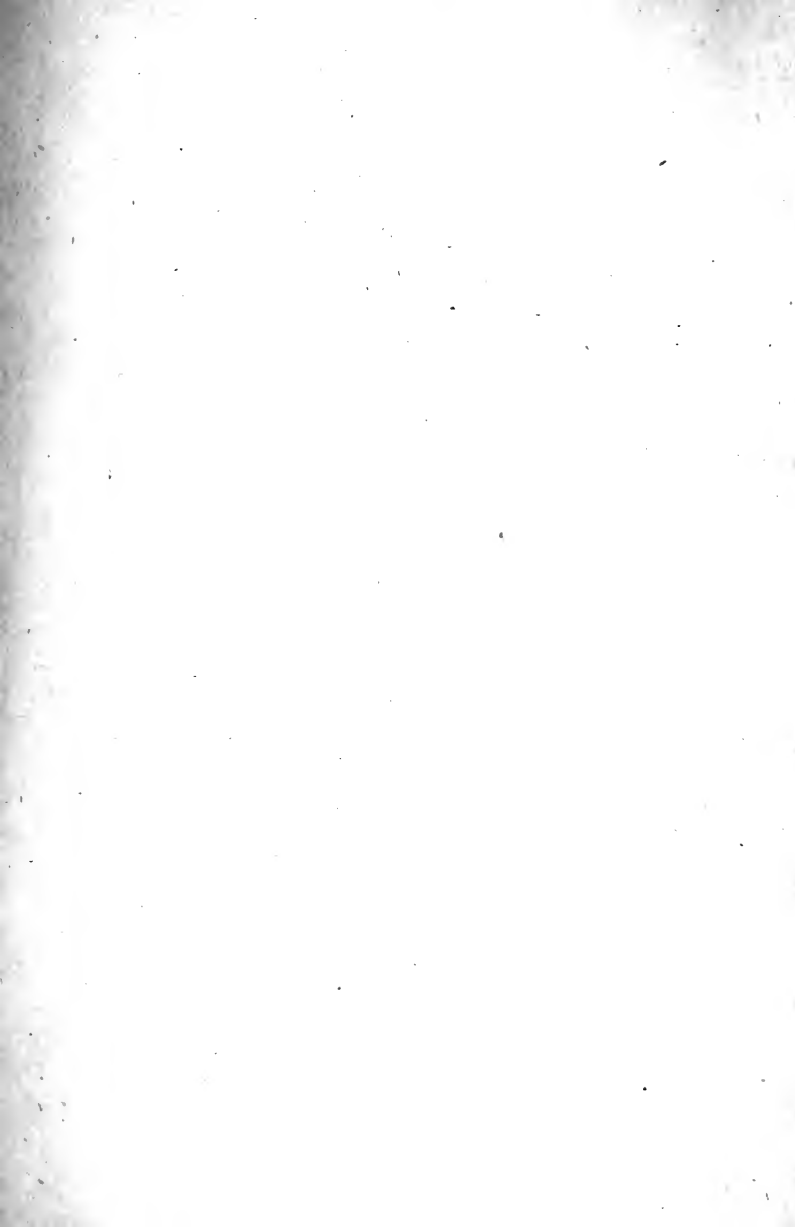


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N O R A .

VOL. II.

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N O R A.

BY

THE LADY EMILY PONSONBY,

AUTHOR OF

“THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE,”

&c., &c.

Fierce passions discompose the mind
As tempests lash the sea.

COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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N O R A .

CHAPTER I.

MR. POWDERHAM was the famous attorney of the county in which the Spa stood. He knew everyone's affairs, was everyone's counsellor, and the master of many minds. In his hands was the property Mr. Fanshawe wished Nora to purchase. As soon as he had heard from Nora that she liked the looks of the country, her guardian, anxious to bring the matter to a decision, wrote to Mr. Powderham on the subject, and hearing from him that in his hands the affair

had been placed, and that an immediate settlement was agreeable to him, desired him to wait on Nora and learn her wishes.

His visit roused her from the apathy into which Henry's departure had thrown her. For he did depart. Miss Willis had assured her that he would return, that when his passion was past he would be sorry for the language he had used. She had herself hoped it might be so. But he went the morning after the scene had occurred, and a day or two afterwards his departure was mentioned by Mrs. Elliott.

Mrs. Elliott was a lady who was always suspecting, perhaps hoping for the discovery of incipient romances. She had suspected one on the present occasion, but Henry's sudden departure puzzled her.

On the evening of the day of his visit to Nora he appeared at dinner grave and gloomy. She accused him of abstraction, and archly suggested that he had left his thoughts with some inhabitant of the Spa. He shortly replied that he had left the Spa long before she did, and had been to a neighbouring town. Which was true, for he had walked there and back as a means of quieting his excited thoughts. She was surprised, but said no more. A few people came to dinner, and Henry was allowed to be as gloomy as he pleased.

The following morning he told her he must go to London. When asked why, he replied, "On disagreeable business." There was nothing more to be said, and Mrs. Elliott was obliged to lay by her suspicion of a dawning romance. When

next she saw Nora she mentioned his departure. She had given up her romancing, and mentioned it casually. After a moment's thought, Nora said,

"Did Mr. Devereux tell you that he had discovered we were relations?"

"No," Mrs. Elliott cried, in surprise. "He came home in a very odd, a very gloomy state of mind, but he said nothing of the sort. The discovery was not unpleasing, was it?" And she smiled confidently.

"It annoyed him," Nora said, "and perhaps with justice. There were old feuds between our families, and he was displeased at having been forced into friendliness without his consciousness and without his will."

Mrs. Elliott looked full of curiosity, but she only said,

“That was not very wise on Mr. Henry’s part, was it?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps he had cause to complain, though, indeed, I did not intend to mislead. Has he ever spoken to you of a Miss Smythe?”

“Once—only once. Are you Miss Smythe?” with a sudden burst of intelligence. “Oh, yes, of course you are. That explains it all!”

“I changed one letter of my name when I came of age.”

“And why? Forgive me if I ask curious questions.”

“I dislike the name of Smythe,” Nora said resolutely; then, with a slight pink on her cheek, added, “I always hoped also to meet, as I have done most unexpectedly, a relation. I grieve for our quarrels, and I wished we might be friends before prejudice

and hate interfered. But it has been in vain."

"I know very little," Mrs. Elliott observed after a moment. "He once spoke to me about Miss Smythe; and, to say the truth, what he said was so foolish, that I have avoided the subject ever since."

She had paused to consider what words she should use. Henry had, in fact, in speaking once of his future prospects, alluded to the enormous riches which only "one life" withheld from him; and when Mrs. Elliott had sagely said, "One life is as good as another—I advise you not to dwell on such an unchristian thought," he had entered excitedly on his defence, speaking bitterly of the Miss Smythe whom he had little reason to love, but whose life, he assured her, was a matter of total indifference to him. She might live as long as she liked

for anything he cared ; but if she died he should not mourn in sackcloth—— ; and a good deal more to this purpose.

Nora soon changed the subject. Her conscience had reproached her for the little mystery she had made ; and, as a point of duty, she had determined to tell Mrs. Elliott who she was ; but the subject was annoying, and she escaped from it, after begging her not to talk of what she had heard.

The knowledge that Henry was gone did not raise her spirits, and, as was said, depression stole over her, until aroused by Mr. Powderham's visit. She had felt that life was over, that in her failure to win her cousin, every purpose of existence was at an end ; and it was not until he began to speak, and to point out all on which she must decide, that she found life was not yet begun.

Mr. Powderham had been amused at the

idea of coming to converse with a young lady of eighteen; still more was he surprised at finding that she had an opinion. His idea of the capacity of his fellow-creatures was not high, and instead of thinking the gift of common sense a common one, he was accustomed to say that there was not above one sensible man in a century. He, of course, was the representative of that rare class in the nineteenth century.

Nora did not enter on business—not, that is to say, on the buying and selling part of the business; but finding that her guardian had decided on the purchase, and that the settlement would be immediate, she had many questions to ask regarding the state of the property—questions which showed Mr. Powderham that he had to deal with an independent mind, not with that which he preferred, a puppet.

The property belonged to a bad family. Mr. Powderham was anxious to dispose of it without much talk on the subject. A good price was, of course, desirable ; but an immediate sale—a sale without advertisement—was still more desirable. This Mr. Fanshawe knew, and Nora, therefore, was to become the possessor before the world in general knew that a sale was decided on.

She suddenly found herself the mistress of an enormous property—one on which the responsibilities of property had never been felt. There was also another weighty question pending. There was no house. She must decide on the spot where she would build, on the style of building, and the thousand questions which such an important subject must raise. It was indeed like the beginning of life, and for the moment her disappointment faded away.

It was on the subject of this house that Mr. Powderham found her capable of an independent opinion. He had his own opinion—a strong one. There was a house for sale belonging to a private person, which was capable of becoming the groundwork of a large family mansion, and which a small sum might make suitable for immediate occupation.

But this house was distasteful to Nora. It was close to the Spa ; it was several miles from the part of the property which attracted her—a poor and populous part—and it was built in the style of a modern villa ; a style for which, in her residence at Cheltenham, she had acquired a great dislike. One of these objections might have been overruled, but the three together formed a phalanx that was invincible, and Mr. Powderham, to his great surprise, found

himself foiled. Not that he had any personal interest in the matter, but when he gave advice he liked to have it taken; he was not fond of man or woman who differed from him.

Nora, accustomed to have her own way, and having no knowledge of Mr. Powderham's character, spoke out her opinions fearlessly, and attempted no sweetening of her rebellion. She was very civil and very much obliged for his advice, but she did not like it, and so the matter ended. He was perfectly civil also, and showed no vexation; but he disliked her, took a prejudice against her, and thenceforward saw all she did through a prejudiced medium.

Nor was he conciliated when, three or four days afterwards, she wrote to ask his advice on a site she had found and

chosen for her house. It was five miles from the Spa. On the other side of the property there lay some beautiful green and sloping meadows, which seemed born, if such an expression may be used, to be enclosed for a cultivated demesne. On these meadows, in a pretty position, stood an old farm-house, from which the present inhabitant, Nora had ascertained, would be glad to be removed. This farm-house was built of white brick, with a dark red roof, lightened by tall chimneys and pointed windows. It took her fancy, and she planned to make it the private portion of the intended house, and to add the rest in the same style.

“Here is my plan,” she said to Miss Willis, having sketched and lightly coloured the future mansion. The old part formed one side of a square. Then was

added a long low front, and then another side to the square. It looked, on paper, as large and roomy as Aladdin's palace, and Miss Willis opened her eyes.

"It will be a long while before your family can inhabit such a house," she said.

"*My* family," Nora said, laughing. "Yes, indeed, I hope it will. But I must have a house for my friends, must I not?" She stopped, and then added, "Perhaps you are thinking, as I do myself, that I have no friends. But I must be ready for them in case they come. If my mother and her children should want a home, must I not be prepared? And should my cousins, the young Devereux, need amusement and change, I would offer it if I could. Though I have been disappointed, I do not mean to give them

up. What should I care for this house, or any other thing, if it was not to give pleasure to others?"

"You are quite like Mr. Fanshawe," observed Miss Willis, and she sighed as she spoke.

The site, with the plan, was, as has been said, submitted to Mr. Powderham; but though approved, he was not conciliated by it. The place was so well chosen, the plan so feasible, and the inquiries that had been made so very much to the point, that he was quite disgusted. Had he suggested it to Nora, and she accepted it from him, he would have loved her much; but, since the contrary was the case, he loved her little; and though perhaps the inference he drew was not a logical one, he spoke of her thenceforward as "that foolish woman,"

tapping his forehead when her schemes and plans were talked of in his presence.

CHAPTER II.

HENRY DEVEREUX returned to London, and to his father, and there made known to him what had passed and what were his intentions.

“And I wish to know, sir,” he said, peremptorily, “whether you were aware from where the legacy came?—whether, in fact, you also deceived me?”

Mr. Devereux quailed for an instant before his fiery son, and then answered boldly, “No.”

“I am glad of that, father, very glad.”

"But you will allow me to add, Henry, that if on discovery whence it comes you give it up, you are acting like a fool."

"Then I *am* acting like a fool, for I *have* given it up. I would rather die, beg, or steal, than live upon her bounty, and so I have sent her word."

"You are a fool!" said his father, contemptuously. "Live upon her bounty, indeed! Why, if she gave you all, instead of such mere scrapings as these, you would have but your rights."

"I have no rights," he cried in a firm tone. "Why have you deceived me all my life, talking to me of rights which do not exist?"

For in the calm that had followed upon the storm, Henry, for the first time in his life, had thought; in eight

and forty hours had put away, comparatively speaking, childish things. As he journeyed from Thorneybank to London, his mind, in a ferment, had asked itself question after question; and though to some no answer could be given, to this one a plain one came. What were his rights? None. In blank dismay, in shame and bitterness of spirit, he saw the truth and owned it. When he stood before his father, he was no longer a child.

“That is a matter of opinion,” said his father, in the same cool tone. “As my opinion differs from yours, this discovery will not affect me. I shall take this share of my rights, miserable as it is, and I recommend you to do the same.”

“Never!” Henry said, clutching his fist.

“She may have humbled me, but it shall not be as low as that !”

“What, then, do you intend to do?” and Mr. Devereux fixed his eyes on his son with cold inquiry. “A man must live, and I cannot support you.”

“Work, beg, or steal,” Henry said, passionately ; and after a few more words of the same kind, he left his father alone. He had put away childish thoughts, but calm sense had not replaced the things put away. Thought had always disturbed and agitated—it now frenzied him. How he had laid himself open to that hated cousin, how his foolish thoughts had been undisguisedly spoken, how she must scorn him, how she must have deceived ! Never had his hate seemed to burn so fiercely as now ; and yet the thoughts of *her* scorn and his humiliation maddened him.

Mr. Devereux talked coldly to his son, but his inward feelings were not cool. Disturbance in him took no outward shape ; but he was disturbed. What was Henry to do ? He had said he was unable to support him, and he was so. Henry might live at home like a boy, but he had nothing to spare for him. His whole life had been spent in accumulating small sums, and in frittering them away ; and he was still at the same work. Intense application and watchfulness prevented his being in want of those sums necessary for the way of life he led ; but he had no money. He had made no provision for his children—laid up no sums against an evil day. When that hated life came to an end he should have enough. This thought had always been present, and was so still. Nora was between him and money, and

he waited for that impediment to give way.

He was, therefore, far from taking Henry's resolutions coolly ; and finding himself unable to bring forward the arguments that would move him, he desired his wife and Letitia to do what they could. He spoke to each separately, and impressed both with the necessity of saving Henry from ruin.

Mrs. Devereux had more influence with her son than anyone else. Though so obedient to her hard husband, she was always soft-natured, and Henry could only be dealt with by soft words. He heard her earnest appeal without anger, and condescended to argue with her.

“ My dear mother, I am very sorry to distress you ; but the thing is impossible. You cannot wish me to degrade myself to live on charity.”

“Such nonsense you talk, Henry! You know that over and over again that man’s money—I mean my poor dear Uncle Smythe’s money—was left to you; and it is no charity to live on your own.”

“That is the folly on which I have been brought up!” he cried, becoming wrathful. “How can you answer to yourself, mother, for having taught me such miserable trash? What have I to do with her money? What right has a distant cousin to a man’s goods when he has a daughter of his own?”

“Oh! I know very well that you have—at least *I* have. He never ought to have had that daughter. It was very wrong and very unfair. And that’s the reason we ought to have all we can get. Your father says so, and he knows best.”

“Look here, mother—do you like a thief?”

“How can you talk such nonsense?”

“I say do you like a thief?” he cried, raising his voice.

“No, of course not. How can you be so silly?”

“Well, mother, I would rather be a thief; I should think it more honourable to go and steal, than to go and take her money under the vile pretence it is my right.”

“Well, Henry, I think it very unkind; and whatever you are to do I don’t know.”

“Nor more do I,” he said fiercely.

This was the tone of several long conversations between the mother and son. They never advanced beyond this point.

Letitia’s tone was different. The brother and sister were standing in the window of the drawing-room at Kensington (for they were still living in the same house) when she first attacked him.

“So you have had a romantic adventure, and with Miss Smythe!”

The blood flew to Henry's face, and he answered loudly,

“Yes, a very romantic adventure. It is a trick of which an honest woman ought to be ashamed.”

“I don't see that. She wanted to see what you were like, of course. I am sure I hope you have made a favourable impression.”

“I hope I have,” in the same loud, angry voice. “If I have not I will. She shall see I am not to be made a blind fool of.”

“I don't the least think she wants to make a fool of you. Come, Henry, what is she like? Is she handsome, or, as mamma says, ‘has she her poor father's nose?’”

“Handsome or ugly, it is all the same

to me. I hate her!" and he ground his teeth.

"How can you tell stories?" said his sister, archly. "You know that before the fatal secret was found out you lost your heart."

"I! Lose my heart to *her*! I would sooner work in the galleys."

"That may be. But you did it before you could help it. I know you did, or you would not be so fierce about the money. If you did not love her a little, you would not be so afraid of her scorn."

He stood in impotent crimson passion. Words were unable to express the indignation of his soul.

"Look here, Letitia," he said at last, suddenly becoming calm, "if my father has set you on to argue me out of my mind, you may spare your breath. No jeers or jibes,

no prayers or arguments, shall move me. He taught me to hate her, and I hate her ; and I will take no favours where I hate."

Letitia saw she had gone a step too far. She receded.

"Don't suppose papa puts arguments into my mouth. He very naturally wishes you to take the money, and he said I might advise you ; but it is you who put suspicions into my head. Why be so angry and fierce ? What is there to be in a passion about ?"

"Everything," he replied bitterly,—“life itself."

"I agree with you there. Life is not pleasant."

As she spoke somebody passed beneath the window who took off his hat to her. She slightly bowed, with a faint tinge of red flitting over her cheek.

"Who is that?" asked Henry, curiously.

"That. Why, don't you know? It is Mr. Field."

"Field! Why, what do you know of him?"

"He is rather a friend of mine," she said, carelessly.

"Then don't have him for a friend. I hardly know him, but he is a man who makes my blood boil."

Mr. James Field was, as may be remembered, Madame d'Alberg's cousin. He had stuck to the line of life in which Mr. Smythe had placed him, and had got on and risen in it. Mr. Devereux had made his acquaintance at the time of the disputed will, and there had been a kind of acquaintance ever since.

"What were we saying?" Letitia said.

“Oh! I know. That life is not very agreeable. It is not—not our life, at any rate. With a father absorbed in business, and a mother who has no thoughts, and no will, it is not likely to be so. We have a joyless and a comfortless home, and if we can escape from it we are wise.” She spoke with a warmth unlike her usual cold, sarcastic manner.

“I shall certainly do so if I can, and so I advise you to do. Now, Henry, listen to me. There are two things open to you. Treat Miss Smythe either as a friend or as an enemy. If you prefer the old line of hate, why, hate her well, hate her in right earnest, as papa does, and do not be afraid to spoil her of some of her ill-gotten goods. There is, and you know it well, only her life between you and prosperity—between all

of us and prosperity. I wish the life dead with all my heart; but as I would not murder, nor more, I suppose, would you, make the best of it, and take what you can get."

"Letitia!" Henry cried, and he shuddered. Often and often had he vaguely wished the life dead; but he had seen the life now, and he shuddered at her thought, and still more at his own old wishes.

"Well, what have I said? Do we not all wish the life was dead?"

"No!" And he let his hand fall on the window with violence.

"I thought we did. Well, never mind. If you don't like the old one, take a new line with her. Be a friend, and love her if you will. You are young, and handsome, and agreeable. Make her

love you, and make her your wife. Now you have my advice; take it and think about it!"

And she escaped from the storm of passion she saw in his face.

Henry could storm. His sister's words were revolting to every feeling; her alternatives were no alternatives to him. But not the less the question had to be decided, what was he to do? He was one and twenty, and he had no profession, nor had been educated to any profession. His way of life had been idle and careless; his mind was little informed on any subject, and least of all on any useful matters. His reputation was that of an idle young man, nor had he, among his many friends, any who considered him in a better light. And yet the time was come when he must live; and he had,

besides, in idle folly, hampered himself with a debt.

These were the vexing thoughts that agitated and disordered him, disordered him in a degree which told against himself and his powers. He had so allowed his mind to run riot at its will, that when he tried to restrain it, the efforts to think, and the discovery of his incapability to control himself, disordered him more. He knew not where to turn, nor on what to decide. His father, to whom he applied for help and advice, agitated him further. Not that he utterly refused to advise, not that he did not suggest certain applications for employment that might be made, but all he said was accompanied with such taunting words, that Henry's soul was in turmoil, now rising up in defiance, now repelling with scorn,

now wrapping itself up in impenetrable gloom. For many weeks he led a miserable life, and it told on health, strength, and spirits.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER settling her affairs as far as could be done, Nora left the Spa and returned to Cheltenham. As soon as the excitement attending the choice of her site and other arrangements had passed away, her thoughts recurred to Henry, and the old depression returned. The improvement of her mind, which had been her object before this unfortunate acquaintance, interested her no more. Depressed yet restless, she could settle to no occupation.

“You have something on your mind,” said Miss Willis. “Excuse me, but I do not

think you ought to allow *that* circumstance to annoy you. You did all you could for your cousins. If they will not be benefited, the fault is theirs, not yours."

"The fault is mine," replied Nora. "I acted foolishly. I might have guessed that no young man of spirit would bear such interference. What to do now I do not know. If I could only hear something!"

This was about ten days after her return to Cheltenham.

She was not left without hearing something. The morning afterwards she received a letter from her banker, saying that a press of business had prevented him from communicating to her sooner; that some three weeks back he had received a visit from Mr. Henry Devereux. He came, he said, to make certain inquiries regarding the sum paid to him annually, and ended by

requesting that it should be paid no more. The letter asked for instructions on the subject.

“Three weeks ago!” she cried in dismay, “and I have done nothing. If the money is now paid to his father it is useless. He will suspect. I have made him suspect me.”

She sat wrapt in thought.

“If I were you,” observed Miss Willis, “I should consult Mr. Stephen Fanshawe.”

Nora raised her eyes quickly.

“He knows and likes Mr. Devereux, and from what Mr. Devereux said, I am sure he respects him. He might have influence with him. He would, at any rate, advise you.”

“I believe you think Mr. Fanshawe can do anything,” Nora said, and smiled. But she took her advice, and though feeling she

had no right to do so, wrote to Mr. Stephen Fanshawe.

Her letter was long. She had to tell him of the sad end of her plot; she had to blame herself regarding that plot; and she had to ask his advice and help for the future; and in this latter part she unconsciously poured out her feelings and her views of life; how it was not life unless you could help others; and then followed a special application of her duty to her cousins.

More than a week passed before any notice was taken of her letter, and Nora began to think she had done a strange thing, or that her interest in her cousin's welfare was a strange thing; but one morning, having worked herself up almost to despair, when she went down to breakfast she found Stephen Fanshawe.

"I am come for the day," he said.
"I am a bad correspondent, and I waited until I could act."

And he then related to her that he had been kept from acting by a boy's serious illness; but two days before this day had gone to London and seen Mrs. Devereux.

"Not my cousin, then?"

"No. I think I told you that Henry and I are not on good terms. About a month ago I was entreated by a person at Oxford, who took an interest in him, to write and give him some advice. It was reluctantly done, and he never answered me."

"There was a reason for that," Nora said.

"So I imagine now; but I felt that, as Henry had avoided me when pros-

perous, he would not be easily guided by me when in anxiety; so I went to Mrs. Devereux. She and all the family have resented what they call 'my behaviour' to Henry; but she is a soft-natured person, and easily forgets her resentment; and luckily I found her alone. I believe my visit was the greatest relief to her mind."

"They are troubled about him, then?"
Nora asked, anxiously.

"Very much troubled. Henry is not a young gentleman made of wax, and his family are very ill-fitted to deal with him. She says he is now as anxious to work as once he was to be idle, but that he cannot find employment. He is pestered with little bills, and has hampered himself with a debt to a friend, and his father will not help him, and

he does not know how to help himself; and he torments himself and his parents;—and life, the poor woman said, was not worth having.”

“And can I do nothing? What could be more natural than for me to pay his debts? Consider our positions, and all that you know about the old disappointments and troubles.”

“It might be natural; but many things are natural that cannot be done. In this case Henry told his mother that he would much rather steal than receive anything from you. You look shocked,” as if he had seen her face; “but I dare-say Henry feels it, and, to a degree, I respect the feeling; and I think his feelings ought to be considered. But there may be a way to help him, nevertheless.”

“You have a thought,” Nora cried, eagerly.

“Yes,” smiling at her impatience. “You see, he wishes to work, but cannot find employment. His father did so far help him as to procure for him two situations as merchant’s clerk, and he went to try his chance, but he failed. His handwriting is execrable; and he could not add up the simplest column of arithmetic correctly. It is not, his mother says, that he *cannot*, for he is quick, and could soon do what he pleased; but his mind is so agitated that he seems unable to collect himself for any effort. He has now terrified them by threatening to be a private soldier.”

“Oh! but you must prevent it!” Nora cried.

“I will if I can, and will tell you

my thought. But it requires your consent."

"It is given, of course."

"Well, but listen. I went to my father, and asked him first to take Henry into his office; but though he was most kind, he thinks, and now I see it also, that it would not do. His clerks are sharp young men, and Henry's position would be disagreeable. A thought then struck me. Shall you not want some person, a gentleman, to overlook your work and workmen while building your house?"

"Of course I shall!" Nora cried, without in the least knowing whether she did or not.

"I am not sure that it is *absolutely* necessary," and he smiled, "but I think you may make it necessary. Something like a clerk of the works is generally

provided; but this may be a different office. Something like an agent, to watch and report to you, and act for you."

"It seems the very thing. But then," and her countenance fell, "what is the use, if he will not take anything from me?"

"Not take, perhaps, but earn. There is a great difference. I have always found that, in the midst of his whims, Henry has great good sense. I think he will see the difference. You can but try."

"Will you do it?" Nora asked, timidly; "or am I giving you too much trouble?"

"No trouble at all, if it was wise; but I think it will come best from yourself. Let all be open and direct—no negotiations. Do you see what I mean? Write to him a simple statement—you will know what to say."

It was easy for Stephen Fanshawe to write a simple statement. Nora felt utterly perplexed. One wrong word might make worse confusion than ever. She could bear no part in the conversation, and shortly retired to her room to think. She was anxious to act while Stephen Fanshawe was in the house.

But when she had taken up a pen and made an effort to collect her thoughts, she did not find the difficulty so great as she had anticipated. She gradually simplified her thoughts, and instead of taking an excursive view of life, of wills, of money matters, of past feelings and present feelings, all which had in the first instance seemed necessary, she became aware that the less that was said the better.

“My dear Cousin.” Thus she began

after much consideration. "Dear Mr. Devereux" did not express that nearness to him, that right to be interested, which she wished to convey. "My dear Henry" was out of the question. This, then, seemed all that was left to her:—

"MY DEAR COUSIN,

"Though we parted in anger, it was not long before I became convinced that your displeasure was just, and therefore my anger is gone. I am grieved to have given you so much annoyance. If I could I would explain my motives, but such things are more easily fancied than explained. I will only say this, that my wish was to be of use to my relations; and having heard that some at least had a prejudice against me, I tried to do away with the preju-

dice before I made their acquaintance.

“I am still of the same mind, and that is the cause of my troubling you with a letter. At this moment there is a place at my disposal, which I would rather entrust to a relation than to a stranger. It is to overlook the workmen who will shortly begin to build my house. The salary is to be four or five hundred a year, and the duties, I am told, will be neither difficult nor arduous. If you would undertake this for me it will be a great pleasure, and it will show me that you forgive me for the annoyance I have so thoughtlessly caused you.

“Your affectionate cousin,

“NORA SMITH.

“P.S. My guardian, Mr. Fanshawe, will tell you all particulars.”

When her letter was written, Nora returned to her guest with a light heart, and was amused by his expressing a wish to see Cheltenham, and his inviting her and Miss Willis, if convenient, to walk with him.

Nora's letter was to go by the post, and until she received an answer no new step was to be taken. Stephen Fanshawe promised to make his father conciliatory and encouraging, if Henry should call upon him, and there was no doubt that his father would obey him. His visit, therefore, brought things to a satisfactory end. Nora's letter went by the post, and was duly delivered. Henry was not at home, and it was placed by the servant, with other letters, in his room.

CHAPTER IV.

HENRY was now in the habit of having letters. During his prosperous days he had visited many shops of various kinds, not running up large bills, but buying some article he fancied, with a promise to call and pay. How the whole mercantile body in England could have heard that the little prosperity he had enjoyed was now departed, it would be hard to say, but such appeared to be the case; for although he had never been troubled before, little bills from divers parts of London and England were now suddenly sent in.

It gave him a feeling of desperation when, morning after morning, these little bills appeared upon his table; and yet, notwithstanding the desperation it caused, he would not draw a small balance which remained from his last quarter, and which would have been sufficient to set this particular annoyance at rest. Not one penny of *that* money would he touch, as he observed to himself again and again, grinding his teeth as he said it.

He had been persuaded at this moment by a young man, one of the least idle of his associates, to dine and sleep at his father's villa at Hampstead. It was the first diversion Henry had taken, and he was persuaded to it only because the whirl of his brain frightened him. He had attempted to take some lessons in arithmetic, and partly from the agita-

tion and nervousness into which the attempt cast him, and still more because his preoccupied mind refused to clear itself of its imaginings, and give itself to its subject, he had disgraced himself. This would not have mattered could he have taken it good-humouredly; his teacher was probably accustomed to the sight of failure, but Henry could not take it calmly. He saw contempt, as he fancied, in the face of his instructor; he heard words of condemnation and contempt, and he quarrelled with him.

It was after the despair caused by this last occurrence that Henry had accepted the invitation to the house of his friend. Another day of thought upon his prospects would, he felt, make him mad in good earnest, and he went. It was the home of a rich merchant with a large

family. There were games, and there was music, and singing, and all that Henry had formerly most enjoyed. But he could enjoy nothing now.

“I thought you said he was such a capital fellow,” said one of the girls to her brother.

“So he is, but he is out of sorts. Don’t notice him. The change will do him good.”

It was an amiable family, and the handsome young man out of sorts became a subject of interest with the young ladies. They did not notice his depression, but they tried hard to please, and so far succeeded that Henry returned to London in a saner state of mind. For more than a month he had listened unceasingly to his father’s cold words, his mother’s complaints, his sister’s sharp

remarks, and his own despairing cogitations. It was no wonder that his poor brain had lost its tranquillity. The fresh air, the change, and the kindness he had received, all combined to allay the inward fever, and, to his surprise, he whistled as he walked along the streets. But the sound of the whistle brought him back to himself. "What's the use?" he said, gloomily, and the black dog sprang on his shoulders again. He banged the door of the house as he entered with his wonted impatient movement, and strode up to his room without vouchsafing an inquiry after the health of his family.

"You will find some letters in your room, sir," said the housemaid, as he passed her on the stairs.

"Hang them!" was his gracious reply.

There were five letters on his table.

He knew the look of them and their contents well; nevertheless, in gloomy disgust he opened them. One was a small bill of five and sixpence for a pot of pomatum; another was of ten shillings for a "waterfall." But there was a more serious one, a few words to remind him that he had never paid for a gun purchased the year before, a matter of twenty or thirty pounds.

Henry groaned aloud. Not that this addition made any very great difference in the amount of debt that hampered him. But there was something in it which at that moment completely overset him. He dropped the bill and groaned. It was then that his eye fell on Nora's letter, which was the last in the heap. He was not very well acquainted with her handwriting, but by some intuition he recog-

nized it, and he shuddered as he took it up. It was opened, however, and read. But his mind, overset and excited, could not calmly understand its contents.

“She is determined to trample upon me!” he cried passionately; “and I will *not* be trampled on. Thus I treat her and her offers,” and he threw the letter on the ground, and put his foot upon it with a stamp.

Thus he stood, when there came a little, sharp tap at the door, and without waiting permission to enter, Letitia opened it.

“You intended to escape me,” she said, with a laugh, “but you won’t. I heard your very dignified slam, and should know it among a thousand noises, and I came up to see what is the matter now.”

She walked a few steps towards him, and then exclaimed,

“Why, what *is* the matter now? Goodness gracious me! you look as fierce as crooked-backed Richard in the play last night.”

“I didn’t tell you to come in here,” Henry replied. “I am very busy, and I don’t want you.”

“Not very busy, I think. Dancing on a piece of paper,” for her quick eye had seen it at once.

“Not dancing on a bit of paper,” he said passionately; for, like a child, he could be played upon to any extent. “Trampling on it, if you will.”

“All the same. From the fierceness of your face, I did not suppose it was a graceful dance. Well, what is it? One of your precious bills? How childish!

I would not vex myself about a bill."

"It is *not* a bill!" in a very loud voice.

Letitia was perfectly aware of that; but she paused a moment to examine his face before she said—

"I guess it. You have received an offer of marriage from Miss Smythe, or Smith, or whatever she chooses to be."

"Have done with your folly!"

"Let me see how she words it," and she stooped and endeavoured to pull the letter from under his foot. "It is an awkward thing for a lady to do; but I have no doubt she does it well."

"Have done, I say!" he cried; and he took up the letter and put it in his pocket.

"Come, Henry, don't be nonsensical. I know it is from Miss Smythe. I looked

over your letters this morning, and I saw the Cheltenham post-mark. That is where she lives, is it not?"

"I neither know nor care."

"Well, if ever a man quarrelled with his bread and butter, it is you. What is in that letter of course I can't guess, but that it is an offer of something I am sure. I don't exactly suppose she mentions marriage; but that is the aim and end, depend upon it. From all I hear, she does not find many lovers, notwithstanding her riches, and she is determined to make hay while she can."

"Letitia, I hate you!" he cried with vehemence.

"Do you? You are not singular in that. I have not many lovers either. But no matter for my affairs. I want to give you advice. Make up to that

woman, whether you can like her or not ; make her like you, and then profit by it."

"I believe you are—" he paused.

"Well, what?" laughing.

"A fiend, Letitia."

"Indeed I am not. I am only advising you for your good. If you could make her like you, and then ill-use her, I own I should be glad. I hate her, and a revenge in that small way, a jilt, an offence to her pomp, would be a brilliant revenge ; but I am sorry to say I have no such hope. I know you are in love with her ; if not, you are too soft to take any revenge."

"Go away, and leave me alone!" he cried half passionately, half wearily. The soothing of the previous evening's refreshment, even while soothing, had unstrung him. While his sister spoke, there was a

choking sensation within which seemed as if it must find vent in tears.

“As you please. Only this, Henry—take my advice, and, whatever it may be, accept her offer. I don’t believe in disinterested offers; I think people always have a motive for what they do; above, all I don’t believe in disinterested offers from *her*. I think she has a selfish motive in making up to you, and, as I can think of no other, I suppose that motive to be love. If so, don’t *you* be a fool and throw your good hands away. Now I have done.”

He made no comment nor answer to what she said, and she closed the door and left him. Then he sat down at the table and put his face in his hands, and sighed as from his heart’s depths. Letitia’s words had not affected him as she intended, but the man-

ner in which they affected him tended to the same result.

She wished him to accept the offer, and she supposed every man would be flattered by the suggestion that he had gained a heart. Of the malice that coloured all her words she made no account. She had a malicious disposition, and her words and thoughts were naturally coloured by it. But while her suggestions of Miss Smythe's affection for himself passed totally unheeded by Henry's ears, the maliciousness of her words made him shudder.

He shuddered, not at Letitia, she was nothing to him, but at himself. Why was this innocent being, who had innocently inherited that thing which they desired, to be treated as he had treated her; to be thought of as he thought of her? What had she done, that he should trample on her kindness?

He raised his head and drew her letter from his pocket, and as he read it tears fell from his eyes. It was the contrast of her words, soft, kind, truthful, and touched with gentle reproach, to the words of his sister and his own hard thoughts, which thus affected him. His nerves were unstrung, and for a few moments the tears dropped one by one on the letter, and he was unconscious of it. When he did perceive them, although he dashed them away with a passionate gesture, he still remained gazing on the words before him, and yielding to the softer impulse that was stealing over him.

Henry was the slave of his impulses. He had never learned, had scarcely been taught to control them, and after a short cogitation he yielded to his impulse now. It was on this occasion a good one, a forgiving impulse, one tending to humble

himself; and, without consulting anyone, he took up a pen and wrote :—

“MADAM,

“I accept the offer you make me, and will do my best to discharge the duties you entrust to me faithfully.

“I know well that I am at present unfit for such a charge, but I will endeavour to make myself fit; and I trust you may not repent the generous confidence you show in me.

“Your humble servant,

“HENRY DEVEREUX.”

The formal style proceeded from three different sources, of none of which he was exactly conscious. He only knew that so, and so only, did he choose to write; that

as a stranger only did he choose to be employed by her.

The three sources were pride, self-defence, and hate. It was a balm to his impotent pride to express himself thus. The style he used was an answer to his sister's insinuations; and to sever himself from her, to place her in her personal relations far from him, was food to that hate which, in the midst of his penitence and softer feelings, still fretted him, still kept him unquiet and disturbed.

When his letter was written, and the envelope directed, he rose and rang his bell with vehemence. The nurse and a housemaid both flew to answer it. Henry was the only person who was loved or respected in the house. His ways certainly asked for no great respect, and his "Hang them" to the communica-

tions made him were not strictly to be called courteous. Still, so it was. Henry was beloved, and in a certain sense respected also. The servants, when they looked in his face, saw the good nature that shone through the faults; and, looking up to that good nature, revered it.

He took no great notice of the *empressement* shown to obey him, but said with peremptoriness,

“Beg my mother to come up and speak to me.”

The door closed, and he stood with the two letters in his hand until his mother came.

“Goodness me, Henry, do you want to startle us quite out of our wits?” she began, gaspingly.

“No, mother—never mind. I want you

to read these two letters. There, sit down," perceiving she was really out of breath. "I beg your pardon." He pushed her into a chair, and put the letters into her hand; then stood looking at her.

"Now, for goodness sake, Henry, do turn your eyes away! How ever am I to read if you stand staring like that." Most people would have felt the same.

"Remember, mother," he said, as he moved away, "that I ask no opinion. I want you to read them, that you may tell my father what I have done. What she says, and what I have said. Don't hurry yourself. When you have finished, I shall take my letter to the post at once."

"Do you want me to learn them by heart, then?" she asked, in sincere alarm.

“No, no, only remember them. Get on, mother, pray do.” He spoke coaxingly—he was hardly ever ferocious with her.

It took Mrs. Devereux a considerable time to master the two letters. From maternal affection, she read Henry’s first; and not understanding it in the least, had to turn to the other. “Who is Madam?” she inquired, while she was puzzling over it; but as her son did not answer, she asked no further questions. When Miss Smith’s had been fully mastered, she turned again to Henry’s, and the first comment she made on the correspondence was—

“I don’t see why you put ‘your humble servant’; you are quite as good as she is. In point of family a great deal better, as I have often told you.”

“Never mind, mother. I put what I thought best. I do not want any opinion ; I only want you to know what I do, and to tell my father. Of course,” and he kissed her, “I shall be glad if you are glad.”

Henry’s little tendernesses were the one charm of Mrs. Devereux’s life. He was the only one of her children who ever kissed her, except at stated times ; and whenever he kissed her, she felt like a slave at his feet.

“Of course, my dear boy, I am very glad. It seems quite like what people call an opening ; and I daresay the work will be nothing so very hard. Odd work it sounds, looking after workmen ; but I daresay you will like it better than sitting at a desk.”

She did not feel very clear as to whether he was to make mortar or not : but she felt this would be rather good fun if it were so.

“Oh! yes, I shall like the work. Do you remember the letters, mother?”

“Yes, pretty well. They are very proper letters. I don’t quite like that humble servant, but perhaps I am wrong.”

“That will do, then, mother. And I hope,” he added, and as he spoke he kissed her again, “that I shall never in future worry you as I have done for the last month.”

“I am sure I hope not,” she honestly said, notwithstanding the kiss. “I assure you, my dearest boy, I have hardly slept a wink; for what was to become of you I did not see.”

“No more did I. Now, mother, that will do.” And she obediently disappeared.

She reserved her news till her husband came in, notwithstanding Letitia’s pertinacious efforts to know what that idiot Henry

was about. It was not often that she was placed in a position so important. When he came in she made her statement, and considering all things, made it pretty faithfully. She did, indeed, leave both her hearers in great perplexity as to what the proposed office was, some idea of manual work lingering in her head; but still she conveyed a not unfaithful idea of the correspondence; she especially remembered, and reported with emphasis, the beginning and end of each letter.

“How ridiculous of Henry!” was Letitia’s comment. “I would have died sooner than put ‘humble servant’ to her.”

“I did point that out,” replied her mother. “I told him that he was as good as she was in point of family, and a great deal better.”

“That has nothing to do with it, mamma.

If the Queen was writing, she might put it to you if she pleased. But I would not have put it to *her*. So that was the mystery! Well, he has taken my advice."

"You do not speak, my love," said Mrs. Devereux, looking at her husband. "I hope you do not disapprove of what Henry has done?"

Mr. Devereux was looking fixedly at the fire. On his hard, impassive face no expression was to be seen. Even Letitia did not feel certain of his feeling on the subject.

After a moment Mrs. Devereux repeated a part of her question.

"I do not know," he then said, turning slowly round, and speaking with that cold calm bitterness which made his voice at times unlike a human voice, "whether I am most disgusted or delighted."

His wife, even after her many years' experience, totally blind to his unamiable disposition, gazed at his hard face with amazed curiosity. He answered the gaze.

"I am disgusted with Henry for accepting a servile employment under such a woman ; but my disgust is qualified by the delight of knowing that he can do her nothing but mischief."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Devereux, "I think Henry will do his best."

A sound came from her husband that was more like a laugh than anything that had ever proceeded from him. But such a laugh as it was ! It made his wife uncomfortable ; it even for a moment repelled Letitia. Nothing more was then said about Henry's prospects. Later in the evening, when Letitia, who, find-

ing, as was usual, the society of her parents wearisome, retired, Mr. Devereux spoke again.

“You will tell Henry from me that I approve,” he said, suddenly looking up from some papers he was studying.

“Yes, my love. I hoped you would.”

“That is quite enough for him to know. You need not say another word.”

“No, my love.”

“If he can bring himself to receive as pay the money which is his own, it is his affair, not mine. If justice will not give it, let us take it when we can.”

“I sometimes think,” observed his wife, after a moment of intense thought, “that perhaps all the money *is* hers. In a kind of way, at least,” seeing his darkening face.

“We may think any folly,” was all he coldly observed, and returned to his papers.

CHAPTER V.

NORA had not shown her letter to Miss Willis, nor did she show Henry's answer.

"It is hard," she sighed, as she read it. However, something had been done, and she felt she ought to be satisfied. And after the first disappointment in the style of the answer was over, she *was* satisfied. To Miss Willis she only told the fact of the acceptance of the offer.

"You see you were right," she said, smiling. "Mr. Fanshawe can do anything."

Her next task was to write to Mr. Powderham, and she set about it. Not, indeed, that she felt much difficulty. Her care for him was too little for her to study his character, her confidence in herself too great to allow herself to be in his hands; and the difficulty arose more from the wording of her letter, the wording of the description of office she intended Henry to hold, than from any fear of his opinion, or desire for his approbation.

Hence the style of her letter was authoritative, not suggestive. Not authoritative with any unmannerly assumption, but speaking of the thing as done, of the affair as settled, leaving no loop-hole to the man who loved to advise and govern, to take that office upon himself. Hence, also as usual, Mr. Powderham

was disgusted with her; nay, more, so angry was he at a young woman daring to take such affairs into her own hands, that he lost his calmness, and entered into opposition.

He wrote a formal letter, telling her he was sorry to say the thing was impossible. It would have been better had she communicated with him before she made arrangements. He must inform her that he had already engaged a clerk of the works, an efficient man of over thirty, and his supervision would be sufficient. His style was as peremptory as hers, and he left her, also, as he thought, no loophole for insubordination.

Nora's eyes flashed as she read the letter, and she replied to it not only authoritatively, but with haughtiness. She said the arrangement had been made

after due consideration, and she intended to hold to it. These were not the words, but this was the sense of her letter.

Had Mr. Powderham been a very clever man, he would have known how to make Nora, with a will, as docile a client as one who had no particular will. But he was a clever man, not a *very* clever man, and he made a mistake. It so happened that never before had an employer acted quite without consulting him. "I'll talk to Powderham," was, even with men, the common phrase; and when the day came when he was not talked to he did not know how to act. He made a mistake and rebelled.

Instead of answering by letter, he made a circuit on his road to London and called on her. She received him courteously; wilful but placable. He came to her wil-

ful and gloomy, a kind of cold thunder, thunder-clouds, but no lightning, in his air and looks.

Nora would not enter on grievances, and, taking his visit as a visit, began to fear he had had a cold journey.

“It was cold, madam ; but I was forced to lengthen it and to travel all night, that I might call upon you. The thing is impossible ; no sane person could propose it ; and I thought it more courteous to tell you this by word than by letter.”

Nora was astounded—not abashed, but astounded—at his presuming to dispute her will.

“I am sorry to say, Mr. Powderham, that it is done,” she said, as calmly as she was able.

“Impossible, madam ! I should not be doing my duty if I allowed it. What !

place a young man, without education, without experience, and, as I understand, of very doubtful character, in a position of such importance ! It is madness !”

“He is my cousin,” she said, with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks.

“Were he twenty times your cousin, madam, that relationship could not make him fit. As I understand, also, the cousinship is not of that degree which gives him a claim upon you. You have a cousin nearer than that.”

He paused for a moment, and though not a bad-hearted man, so irritated was he, that he watched with malicious hope to see her wince. Instead of wincing, however, she simply stared.

“You must be aware of the many cousins you have on your mother’s side,” he went on. “One of these, a man over thirty,

with his wits about him, and considerable experience, applied to me for employment, and I had selected him, thinking to give you pleasure, for the very office you have designed for young Mr. Devereux."

"What is his name?" Nora asked, for a moment her thoughts entirely diverted from the subject in hand. Of her mother's relations she had heard. Monsieur d'Alberg had taken care of that; but he was little informed about them; nor, having accomplished his object, had he cared to know more. Her mother hated to talk of them; and Nora being, as has been said, without any good reason, as proud as a princess, had hitherto swept them from her thoughts, as things belonging to her mother, with which she had nothing to do. Nor had they yet found her out; they were only just beginning to do so.

They had supposed her to be still under her mother's wing.

She asked her question, therefore, with unfeigned euriosity.

“Mr. Field—Mr. James Field. His birth was nothing, I believe, that a man cares to talk about, but he has raised himself, and is now a man of education and experience—a gentleman, I may say. I am not personally acquainted with him—I shall see him during my stay in London; but I form my judgment from his letters, and from report.”

Now, the little history of the transaction was this. James Field, hearing from Letitia Devereux of Henry's adventure, began to consider what profit he could make out of his relationship to the heiress. He met Letitia but seldom; and having heard the tale, he said no more

to her, trusting to his own wits to help him.

He made inquiries regarding Nora's plans. It took him some little time, but he discovered all, and wrote to Mr. Powderham, asking for employment; mentioning, in short, the very office of clerk of the works. But there was nothing remarkable in the letter; and though he stated he was related to Miss Smith, that relationship gave him no claim.

Mr. Powderham left the letter unnoticed, as was his custom with useless applications.

But when a few days afterwards he received Nora's letter, his mind reverted to it; he sought it out, and before he answered her, answered it. He said if on inquiry he found he was up to *his*

mark (for he was conscientious) he would employ Mr. Field.

He told Nora he had hoped to give her pleasure. This was an embroidery on the truth; what he wished was to oppose his cousin to her cousin; but at the moment of selection he had no reason for supposing it would be disagreeable to her. When he began to make inquiries, and heard something of James Field's history, this truth dawned upon him; and after her second letter, it became a truth that was sweet to him.

Nora listened to his reply to her question regarding this cousin, and sat for some moments reflecting on it. When she spoke it was with perfect composure. If the discovery of this cousin annoyed her, she did not allow him to see it.

“I do not know Mr. Field,” she said, “nor can I remember to have heard the name; but I know I have relations with whom I have no acquaintance. As he is a cousin, and as you say he is fit, I shall be glad to have him employed; but it need not interfere with what I have already settled. Mr. Field may be the working clerk. I shall wish Mr. Devereux to be something of a different kind—to watch the building in my stead, to see that all things are well-conducted, and especially to see that the workmen are cared for during the time of the building, mentally and bodily.”

Mr. Powderham indulged in a slight laugh of contempt at this last suggestion, but he knew he was conquered, and his mind, with natural quickness, was seizing on a ground for honourable retreat.

“Well, madam, since such are your views, and since you are willing to throw away five hundred a year on a fancy situation, I have no more to say. All I have to do is to see that your work is well done, that is my duty,”—with pompous dignity—“and it shall be done, come what may. Mr. Devereux may possibly be fitted for such duties as you now propose. I hope so. I have no more to say on the subject. May I ask for a glass of wine?”

“If you had not been so very hasty in attacking me,” Nora said, smiling—for, having had her own way, she had no bitterness on the subject of Mr. Powderham’s opposition—“I should not have been so uncivil as to forget to offer you luncheon. You must have some after your journey.”

She left the room, and he presently sat down to an excellent luncheon. But creature comforts, though they were certainly appreciated, could not make up for wounded dignity; nor could Nora's smiles and kind words soften him. Had he been able to put her down in any way, had she spoken with less self-possession, he might still have taken her to his heart; but he could not help seeing that she had a certain amount of brains, and he was disgusted. He left her, sincerely hoping that she would have to repent of her wilfulness.

When he was gone, Nora sat for an hour with her feet on the fender, and a frown on her brow, unoccupied and brooding. At last she said,

“As usual, I have behaved very badly, Miss Willis.”

“Indeed I do not think so. I hardly think I should have answered Mr. Powderham as calmly as you did.”

“I don’t mean to him,” and she shook her head. “I mean to my relations. The fact is, Miss Willis, my grandmother, my mother’s mother, was the daughter of an innkeeper, and I have always hated the idea; and I have never thought about them as relations, much less made any inquiries about them. But as they are my relations, I suppose I ought to do it.”

“I suppose you ought,” said Miss Willis, who was no flatterer.

“Then it shall be done,” Nora said; and she rose up, and sat down to write to her guardian.

She made no secret of her distaste, but very resolutely said she was now

determined to overcome her feelings, and acknowledge them as her own relations, as well as her mother's. Mr. Fanshawe took her letter to Mr. Conway. It was a case in which he wished to fortify himself with his authority. It was, indeed, a case in which a young woman required the assistance and experience of older men.

"Chain her up somehow," said Mr. Conway, lifting his eyebrows after he had read, "or she will soon be without a tack on her back."

As this was Mr. Fanshawe's own opinion, he wrote her in return a very sensible letter. He begged her to leave her relations alone for the present, promising, meanwhile, to get a faithful report of the circumstances of each.

"If, as I believe," he went on, "they

are well-to-do people, I would do nothing beyond an occasional present, if such should be required. Should any be in want, I agree with you that it is your duty to relieve them, and depend upon it I will not prevent you. You speak of acknowledging them. The word expresses too much. There is no doubt there is a tie of blood between you; but when your grandfather married your grandmother, he raised her into a different position of life. She was wise enough to know this; she was, I believe, very kind, but she never attempted to associate with her relations again. Do not unsettle their minds by filling them with thoughts and hopes which are idle. You could not make all rich; but you might very easily make all discontented.

“As to James Field, his position is

different. He has profited by your father's kindness to him, and has educated and raised himself in life. I have a bad opinion of him, and so I will tell Mr. Powderham; but if he employs him, you will have done all that is necessary on your part towards him. Should he do well, it will be time enough then to distinguish him."

Nora was satisfied with this letter, and was still more disposed to be guided by her guardian's advice, when, a month afterwards, he wrote to tell her that a miller's daughter, a great-niece of her grandmother's, was going to make a very respectable marriage to a young farmer, and he thought a present of a handsome silk gown would be acceptable.

She was delighted, and a handsome gown, shawl, and bonnet, for the wed-

ding dress, were despatched, with a kind letter to the young girl in question. In her letter she touched but lightly on the connection with herself, but putting her mother forward, said she was sure it would give *her* pleasure if this present was accepted for her mother's sake. Indeed, if Mr. Powderham had seen the letter, he would have been forced to own the sense it showed, and would have said, "that foolish woman," with more zest than ever.

The girl belonged to one of the most respectable families of the connection; one who rarely thought of their rich relations, and cared still less to think about them. Nevertheless the young girl and all her family were enchanted at the kind note and present, and a grateful, unassuming letter was written, con-

veying the thanks and good wishes of the whole family. Nora had never yet felt so quiet a sense of pleasure in her riches as this little incident caused her.

CHAPTER VI.

WE must now pass lightly over several months—from December to the August following. Both Henry Devereux and James Field were appointed to the situations laid out for them. Mr. Fanshawe spoke his mind to Mr. Powderham regarding James Field; but as it was only opinion, an opinion founded on his conduct fifteen years before, since which time he was forced to own that he had conducted himself respectably in the eyes of the world, Mr. Powderham saw no reason for refusing him the employ-

ment he sought. His own inquiries had been answered satisfactorily. No one spoke warmly of Mr. Field, but all owned that he was "sharp," and all gave him a fair character. For five years he had been a clerk in the office of a great builder, and the builder said he was perfectly competent to overlook the carrying out of Nora's plan. He was therefore appointed clerk of the works, with a salary of three hundred and fifty pounds a year. In point of money he was no great gainer by this appointment; but he was satisfied. To be an immediate gainer he had not expected.

Henry's situation was one less clearly defined; but in fact he became agent to Miss Smith; he kept the accounts, not only of the building concern, but of the property; he received her communications;

watched to see her wishes and orders enforced and executed ; in short, any commission regarding her new property that she chose to commit to him. All he did was under Mr. Powderham, but the nature of his duties made him more independent than James Field.

From the moment, from the very day that he posted his letter of acceptance, Henry had become a new man—new in this degree, that he set his mind as steadfastly on doing his duty in the charge he had undertaken, as he had hitherto set his mind on pleasing himself. It was no thorough radical change in heart, or temper, or principles ; but it was a radical change of views and habits.

He was not easy in his mind ; he did not bear with serenity his father's ironical approbation ; nor did he himself think

with serenity of being in Nora's service—paid by her. But he was so far a man that, having done it, he stuck to it; swept away disturbing thoughts when they intruded, and, above all, calmed the inward fever by saying that even to an enemy a man should do his duty, and that it mattered little, if it was just pay for a duty done, whether the pay was earned from one loved or hated.

Hence, from this determination to earn and not be indebted, arose a passionate desire to make himself fit; and he gave himself up for the three or four weeks that elapsed before his services were required to self-improvement. It was this occupation of the mental powers that, in fact, soothed and calmed Henry's mind. "Love labour," says William Penn; "if thou doest not want it for food, thou wilt

for physic." It was new to him to have his mental powers taxed, and the taxing was of unspeakable service. He might still have fiery elements within, but there was nothing to kindle them into flame:

With a manly candour which really had in it something noble, he returned to the instructor whom he had insulted; begged his pardon; acknowledged his fault, and said he was come to offer himself again. The instructor accepted the confession, granted the pardon, and renewed his efforts to teach.

To learn with heart and hope is a different thing to the attempt to learn without them. Henry, sane in brain, and resolved to understand, was a different being to the passionate, puzzle-headed youth who had worn his teacher to death a few days before. There was no want

of intelligence in his mind, and he made a progress both in writing and arithmetic which delighted himself and astonished his master. The execrable scrawl became a bold, efficient-looking hand ; the sheets of writing and figures were presented blotless and spotless ; and though he did not attempt the highest branches of arithmetic, he mastered sufficient for all practical purposes, and was enabled to apply what he learned to the art of book-keeping.

The more he applied himself, the more his mind opened, and the more he was delighted with his prospects and himself, and he went down to Riddlemere, when summoned by Mr. Powderham, full of life and eager spirit.

Nora would have given much to invite him to Cheltenham, and communicate to him her many wishes by word of mouth.

But she did not dare. By the style of his letter she understood that he meant to be her servant, not her friend—her humble servant in the proud sense which the words often bear. She understood, and refrained from pressing on an unhealed wound. She went to London and told her guardian her wishes and plans, and he laid them before Henry. She remained to answer the questions which might occur while the interviews were taking place, but Henry never offered to see her, and she made no attempt to see him.

After that a correspondence of a certain kind was opened between them. She sent to Mr. Powderham instructions to be given to Henry—they were simply formal, having neither beginning nor end. Henry answered them, sometimes through

Mr. Powderham, more often directly to herself, but always in the strain he had originally adopted. He wished her to be nothing but "Madam" to him.

It was a shock to him, on his arrival at Riddlemere, to find James Field installed as clerk of the works. As he had said to Letitia, he was a man the sight of whom made his blood boil. He had no reason for his dislike; he was but imperfectly acquainted with the family history, and, had it been better known to him, Field had done nothing but furnish his father with facts, in his attempt to over-set the will; but a reasonless dislike is more trying than one for which there is cause, and it certainly was a trial to Henry's temper when he found with whom he had to do. Being now, however, sane in mind, he could see that quarrels in

his position would be unseemly, and he wisely resolved to keep away from him as much as possible, and to be coldly civil when forced to his society.

James Field, on the other hand, found his position under Henry extremely galling. Henry was the responsible head; in his hands lay all the money transactions; he kept the accounts, he gave orders, he was at liberty to find fault with whatever he thought amiss. James Field paid the men, but under Henry's supervision. He, as he felt, an experienced man of between thirty and forty; Henry a raw, inexperienced, ignorant boy. James Field was aspiring and conceited, and it was very galling to him; nevertheless, for divers reasons, he, too, determined to endure. He had this consolation, also, the knowledge he very

shortly obtained, that Mr. Powderham disliked Henry. This consolation was great.

If Mr. Powderham had not at first disliked Henry, he would have been, after all that had passed, an amiable man; and though not particularly unamiable, he did feel a grudge against him. But, besides this grudge, he really did think the appointment a folly, and he was very keen in watching Henry's conduct. Possibly had Henry shown himself to be a good-tempered fool, he, satisfied that he had been right, would have forgiven and helped him. But Henry showed, in the business he had to do, a kind of homely good sense that was very valuable. His accounts were accurate, his tone with all who came about him was firm and courteous, and his influence was great. Nor were these his only qualifica-

tions. Nora had begged that he might write her an account of the state of the property ; the state of the farms ; the state of the tenantry ; the state of buildings ; the mode of life, &c. ; and Henry performed this task sufficiently well to annoy Mr. Powderham exceedingly. He could not use technical terms, nor write in a properly formal manner, but he had known what he was about, and, having obtained his facts, laid them out with a simplicity of style that made them clear to the meanest intellect.

Therefore it was that Mr. Powderham continued to cherish his prejudice against him, to say constantly that his engagement would turn out ill, and to show marked favour to James Field when the two, as sometimes happened, differed in opinion regarding the building.

Notwithstanding these elements of discord, all things went on smoothly. Fully occupied, interested in his business, and, perhaps, a little elated with his performances, Henry's mind became more composed and rational. He learned something of what patience was, something of punctuality; he learned, also, that, being under Mr. Powderham, he must submit to him, and very imperfectly, perhaps, but in a degree he put in practice what he learned.

There was one subject, however, on which his mind was not yet sane, one which never failed to irritate him, and this, after a time, James Field learned. It was the old subject, Nora. He could work for her, but he could not bear to have the subject of his relations with her handled. James Field found this out, and some strifes ensued in consequence.

Now, as Field, secretly but certainly, aspired to obtain the hand and heart of Letitia Devereux, it was singular that he should take pleasure in tormenting her brother, and this before his object was gained ; but whether it was liking or ambition that prompted him to seek Letitia, there was a stronger passion than either of these in his breast, and this was envy. He envied Henry ; and his nature was such that bad passions, when admitted, took strong hold upon him. He disliked Henry before they were brought into close contact. On one or two occasions when they had met, Henry had treated him with considerable haughtiness. This rankled, but envy never took real possession of his mind until they were placed side by side to work out, as it seemed, their destinies. He then came

to envy him with a baleful envy. He envied his youth and good looks; he envied that thoughtless charm which seemed to win the hearts of the roughest; and still more the respect which, notwithstanding his apparently careless manner, seemed to be accorded involuntarily to his character. But deeper still than this, he envied his favour with Nora. *There* was the sting. The position he held proclaimed that favour; and what might come of it was a fear that made Field mad. He was a nearer relation; he ought, he felt, to have been singled out; that Henry was sought and favoured, he ascribed to his good looks, and what will not good looks do with women? These were his constant meditations.

He, however, and Henry, both go-

verned themselves; and it was only after a time, and when Field had learned how to irritate him, that sharp words arose between them.

On some of these occasions Henry unfortunately lost his self-command, and spoke foolishly.

One morning Henry, while going about his business, passed a knot of people. There were some masons working, and James Field and another man were talking. Their backs were turned, and Henry heard without being seen. James Field was speaking, and in a conceited tone, of his relationship to Nora. Henry did not stay to listen, but only heard some words as he passed, and when he got to a distance he called "Field" loudly. The person summoned did not hurry himself; he was obliged to obey Henry in a

certain sense, but he always did it in a defiant manner. Having kept him waiting, he joined him, and asked what he wanted.

“Only to say one word,” Henry said. “I heard what you were saying as I passed, and I must tell you that I do not consider that way of speaking respectful to Miss Smith. I beg of you to leave it off.”

It was galling enough to be under Henry at all. To be spoken to in this manner was hardly endurable.

“What have you to do with it?” he replied, sharply.

“A good deal. I think I am responsible for the way in which Miss Smith is spoken of by those she employs. I look on it as an unmanly and unmannerly thing to do—to boast, as you have

been doing, of being distantly connected with her."

"Not so very distant. Don't you wish you were as near?"

"Whatever I was or may be, or whatever my feelings on the subject were, I should think it, as I tell you, unmannerly and disrespectful to proclaim the fact here."

Henry was growing warm, and his voice, pitched high, told the fact.

"I don't know why you are to take up the cudgels for her."

"The why is very plain. She has chosen to make me her agent."

"I think there must be another reason," James Field said, mildly. He now knew he was getting the best of it.

"There is none."

"I think there is. I think there must

be a nearer connection in view ; and then, for selfish reasons, a connection with me might not be agreeable."

"I don't know what connection you mean," Henry cried, played upon like a foolish youth, as he was, at the pleasure of the sharper-witted man.

"Oh ! I mean marriage, only I thought it premature to use the word."

"Marriage !" Henry shouted, for the moment beside himself. "Don't you know she is the enemy of our house ? I would sooner die !" And he strode off.

So loud had been his voice, that two workmen at a distance heard the words "enemy of our house," and paused in their work to listen.

They heard no more, for Henry cut short the conversation ; but as he strode away he observed their faces and their

attitudes, and shame came over him. He had done the very thing for which he had reproved James Field. He had spoken of her disrespectfully in presence of the men in her employment. He felt oppressed with shame, and the shame disordered his mind, and for some days he was hardly himself. That inward fever had been inflamed; it was with difficulty that he commanded his temper to Field; it was even with difficulty at some moments that he did not throw up his situation and say he would serve under her no more.

But a few days calmed his mind, and he then forgot the sensations that had embittered it—so forgot them, that he was ready to be played on again.

Mr. Powderham one day found fault with him. A bow-window which was to

have been made according to one plan, had been made according to another which had been rejected. He was very angry, and spoke of Henry's "intolerable carelessness."

Now Henry had misunderstood the order, which had been given in haste. It was a mistake, it was not carelessness, and he said so. He spoke discreetly. Much annoyed at what had happened, he expressed extreme regret, and bore patiently Mr. Powderham's sharp words.

But when Mr. Powderham did not seem to believe him, when he called James Field, and notwithstanding Henry's justification of himself, repeated the charge of intolerable negligence, begging him—Field—to undertake the alterations that were necessary, Henry's temper was roused.

“I do not mind blame,” he cried; “I daresay I deserve it for being blunder-headed; but I will not be accused of negligence, for that my own conscience tells me I do *not* deserve. I work with all my heart and soul, and all the intellect I have.”

“I am sure you do,” observed James Field. “Indeed, sir, negligence is the last thing of which Mr. Devereux should be accused.”

The tone of his voice was so mild, that an uninterested hearer would have supposed he was defending Henry; but Henry detected that tone, that insinuation which he could not bear.

“I don’t want your defence,” he said sharply; “my own conscience is enough.”

“Quite enough; but I must also bear witness that in your *present* business,

negligence is the very last thing to be laid to your charge."

"What do you mean?" said the foolish young man, loudly, while Mr. Powderham looked from one to the other, half perplexed, half enjoying the sight of Henry's discomposure.

"I mean that your private interest in Miss Smith's affairs would alone prevent it."

"My private interest is to do my duty in the situation in which I am placed; and that I shall try to do, whether to a friend or to an enemy, as she is."

"An enemy!" said Mr. Powderham, surprised.

"The enemy of my house—she always has been, and always will be." But he had no sooner said the foolish words than the sharp pain of shame came over

him. His cheek crimsoned, and he stood for a moment discomfited. Then he suddenly said, "But no matter for my private affairs. What can I do to undo the mischief I have done?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Powderham, coldly. "Leave the plans with me. Good morning."

He turned away, and Henry saw the smile on James Field's face as he followed him. It was a hard battle that he fought with himself; he could have followed both and struck them with pleasure. Rage swelled in his breast almost to bursting. And then, while swelling with rage against them, came the remembrance of his own ingratitude. What had she done that he should thus proclaim her everywhere as his enemy? Something like a tear of penitence glis-

tened for a moment in his eye, and allayed while it did so the flame within. And though he dashed the tear away, he walked off in a better mood of mind than after such ebullitions was common to him—a more humbled, a more repentant mood; more forgetful of his enemies and their provocations, more thoughtful of his own errors.

Nora, meanwhile, had passed the year ostensibly at Cheltenham; but she made many visits to London, in the view of choosing papers and furniture; and while there, began to mingle a little in the society to which Mr. Fanshawe introduced her; she also did her best to open her mind by seeing all that it is right to see. And both things were useful to her. Society softened, increased knowledge humbled her. She was apt to be full of her

own concerns, and in society she saw this; while gazing on what was great or good, she felt it. The world was large; human interests various; whereas her unconscious cogitations chiefly related to one man and one woman.

In the month of May, after passing a fortnight in London, and feeling very lonely, even though she shared in its bustle, she visited her mother at Geneva. Day by day, in absence, the love for her mother strengthened—that only near tie—that tie which her own fault had broken; and she travelled to Geneva, full of hopes which a moment's thought ought to have dispelled.

It was not likely that either Monsieur or Madame d'Alberg should be changed, and they were not changed. The illusion vanished when Nora stood in their

presence ; she knew then that she might love her mother, but that there could be no sympathy—that she would never be permitted to pour forth her love.

Two moments only she had during her stay which were satisfying to her heart. They were the moments of meeting and of parting. In those two moments she felt how her mother clung to her ; but with these exceptions all was disappointment. The only change was in a third child, and that again a daughter ; and this event had not smoothed Monsieur d'Alberg's temper. He had endured the prospect in the determination that he would have a son ; but being deprived of this object, his terrors regarding the long family had increased.

Under the influence of this dread, he

had, on the appearance of a third daughter, allowed her to be called Annora. He thought he might thus tie Nora down to provide for one child. So utterly distrustful was his mean mind of that bounteous nature, which only longed to pour out its wealth.

Her mother looked pale and worn, but made no complaints, nor suffered Nora to make inquiries. She feared she but added to her difficulties, and after a fortnight of disappointment she returned to England.

And then, with restless longing, she began to allow her mind to dwell upon the coming event—the taking possession of her own house—the entrance upon that life she had from childhood pictured—the being a great lady, dispensing her bounties on all around her.

Whatever else was now bound up with this dream, as she herself was not conscious of it, need not be touched upon.

CHAPTER VII.

IN the latter end of August, Nora was to take possession. The old part of the house, repaired, papered, and painted, but in its inward form and arrangements left unaltered, had been made ready for her. The rest of the building was unfurnished and uninhabitable, with the exception of one room. This was a drawing-room. The rooms in the old part of the house were low, and were, for the most part, intended for offices. One pretty little room, however, opening on the garden, had been chosen by Nora for her bou-

doir ; but, as it was small and low, she had requested that it might open into the drawing-room, the first room in the new front. This it now did, and as she was to take possession in the summer, the drawing-room had been to a degree made ready for her also.

Mrs. Ratcliffe had arrived early in the month. She was now past seventy, but had more work in her, as she said, than many a young woman "nowadays." She was accompanied by a widowed niece and her little girl. The niece was to be, for the present, cook and house-keeper under her directions, and the little girl, Sophy Brook, about nine years old, was to be brought up under Mrs. Ratcliffe's eye, instructed in the mysteries of household work, and made such a servant "as there used to be."

It was a pleasant, homelike arrangement for the old and attached servant ; it had delighted Nora to make it, and she also looked forward to a share in the joy of instructing little Sophy.

Henry busied himself extremely in the inner arrangements of the house. He had not seen much of beauty or comfort in his own home ; but he had passed a great part of his life in visiting, and in his visits he had not only seen, but, owing to the want of such attractions at home, had particularly noticed the thousand small things which make a room pretty and comfortable. Many men suppose such things grow as they are, like the wild flowers of a field ; but others see and notice, and have a taste for arrangement fully equal to that of women. Henry's new-fashioned taste differed considerably

from that of Mrs. Ratcliffe, and many a fight was the consequence; but, although he was not always as patient or as courteous in enforcing his will as might be, she forgave him all offences, and took him to her heart. Since the day when she first longed to eat him, she had never forgotten him, and, in spite of his whims, she would still have eaten him with great pleasure.

She forgave him even a greater offence. Two or three days before Nora's arrival, he insisted on having Mrs. Elliott over to see all that had been done.

"Now, don't do it, sir. What's the good? I know better what Miss Smith likes than a strange lady can."

"She may not know what Miss Smith likes, but she knows what ladies in

general like. Most of them probably like the same things."

"Not a bit of it, sir. Miss Smith is no more like common ladies than I am like a cowslip."

Henry laughed.

"I shall have my way, Mrs. Ratcliffe," he said, pertinaciously. "I can't believe in any extraordinary difference; and I want to know what a lady thinks."

"He's a wilful young man," observed Mrs. Ratcliffe to Mrs. Brook, "but he's a nice young gentleman, so I let him do as he pleased. Now, for that Mr. Field that goes creeping about, I would have fought him with the broomstick before I would have allowed him to bring a strange lady in."

Mrs. Elliott came over at Henry's summons. She had seen the plan and the

early part of the building, but, having broken her leg in the spring, had not since been over. After approving all within, she walked out, though still lame, into the garden.

The garden was a thing of the future, not the present. It was all rough grass, and so was to be left till the building was over. The long, low front looking south faced the garden; the little boudoir opened to the west side, and the new drawing-room to the south front.

They stood at a distance, looking back, and Mrs. Elliott said,

“Well, yes, I like it now. I must own I thought the plan horrible. I thought it would look like one of the new poor-houses; but I give up. It is odd, but well managed. I wonder if Miss Smith will be pleased. When does she come?”

“The day after to-morrow—Thursday, as we understand at present.”

“Let me know if she puts off. I must come on Friday to welcome her. I am glad for your sake she is coming. You must have had a lonely time of it.”

“I don’t suppose her coming will make much difference to me,” Henry said, colouring as he spoke.

“It must make a difference. It will make a difference to me; much more to you on the spot.”

“That does not follow,” Henry replied gravely. “It may make a difference to you, because you will associate with her on intimate terms. But that can never be the case with me.”

“And why?”

“You know very well, Mrs. Elliott.

We are not enemies; I will not say that—I try not to say it after the manner in which she has behaved to me; but we cannot be friends.”

“And why not, I say? Do not be so foolish. Is it that old offence of the money?”

“No, it is *not* the money!” he cried passionately, switching a little tree with his stick. “Let the money go to the bottom of the Jordan if it pleases. But such things as have passed between us and our families can never be forgotten. Would to heaven they could!” he added, still more vehemently; “but they can’t.”

Mrs. Elliott longed to say “What things?” and it might have been of use to Henry’s mind if she had, to force him to express in plain terms what he had to complain of. But she felt

afraid, and there was a pause. She then rallied, and said,

“How, then, do you mean to behave?”

“As her faithful servant,” he replied, and with a dignity that made her bite her lip to suppress a smile.

“Who is that?” she asked, as, passing within view of the boudoir, a little head, with short fair curls hanging round it, peeped out of the window.

“It’s that little mischievous girl, Mrs. Ratcliffe’s grand-daughter, or some complicated relationship of the kind. I say, Sophy, come here!” he called, authoritatively.

Sophy Brook was a pretty little girl, not ill-disposed, but very vain, and fond of praise and notice. If she was to be the valuable servant Mrs. Ratcliffe in-

tended, much would have to be learned and unlearned. A good deal of supervision was exercised over her by her two guardians, but a good deal of freedom was also allowed; and they did not know how often in those hours of freedom she stole about among the workmen, in the hope of getting a little notice. Any notice was welcome, but the one that was coveted was Henry's. He would indeed, if she intruded when he was busy, push her away most uncereemoniously; but if he was in the mood, he would talk to her with that genuine sympathy in her childish pleasures which children are quick to appreciate.

She came now at his call, frightened, yet holding down her head with a coquettish air.

“What are you doing in there, Miss

Sophy?" he said. "Did your mother give you leave to go in?"

Sophy only hung her head, blushing.

"I thought how it was. Now, mind, you are *not* to go in now the things are set out. If you disobey and anything should be broken—" he did not finish his sentence, but he looked very fierce, and shook his fist most menacingly.

The little girl began to cry—she could never bear to be blamed; on which Henry, mollified, patted her head, pulled out her little soft curls, and told her not to spoil such a pretty face with crying. Sophy, delighted, blushed again, dried her tears with her pinafore, gave one look at him with her pretty blue eyes, and then bounded away.

"What excellent education!" said Mrs. Elliott, satirically.

“Oh! hang education!” he replied; “if there is a thing I hate it is that. Why not please a poor little mortal? Don’t you see how she likes to hear she is pretty?”

“I do indeed,” she replied drily; but what was the use of talking to Henry on the subject; and she said no more.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE great day of Nora's intended arrival came at last. It ended differently from what had been expected. All the day was bustle. Try, as the best-disposed and most methodical people may, to have everything ready, and not to stave things off to the last, still, when the last day comes, a number of mysterious things spring up—though never thought of before, they seem imperatively to demand attention, distract the minds of the sanest, and put elasticity into the joints of the laziest.

All the day, therefore, was bustle, and running hither and thither. In some hearts there was agitation also, which they allayed by fomenting the flame of bustle. Both Henry and James Field were inwardly agitated. Henry, he knew not why; James Field, very consciously, because he felt much would depend on the first impression made on Nora. When he saw Henry bent on beautifying the place, and in the midst of the bustle of the day potting some geraniums to put on the rough grass, he sneered; then, determined to get the best of him, set to work more calmly to smooth and ornament also.

At five o'clock all was ready; but at five o'clock a telegraph messenger arrived, bringing a message that Nora's journey was put off till the following day.

There was a moment of universal depression and disappointment; and then consolation came, in the thought of several more things that might be done to improve. In the hearts of Henry and James Field, at least, this consolation arose.

About seven o'clock, when all business was over, Henry entered the house to take a survey—to see what new suggestions would present themselves for improvements to his criticizing eye. The house was quiet, and, after all the bustle, apparently deserted. Mrs. Ratcliffe and her niece were at tea in the still-room. Now that the excitement was over, and the disappointment over as well, they felt thoroughly tired, and were sitting over their tea and enjoying it, previous to an early retirement to bed. There

was nothing to catch his attention in the quiet passages, and he passed on to the boudoir and thence to the drawing-room. It was a fine but not a bright evening, and the hour made it almost twilight. The windows of the rooms were open, but the blinds had been pulled down.

Nevertheless, there was light enough for Henry, as he stood at the drawing-room door, to admire. He was very proud of this room. It was in some senses his child, his creation, for he had watched over its birth and infancy, and had worn the workmen to death by his determination to have it ready in time. Ready it was, but finished it was not. The paper was only a plain under paper of white ; there was only matting on the floor, and no curtains but airy muslin

ones. For regular furnishing the room was not ready. Very light, however, and airy and pretty it looked, and Henry could see nothing to be altered for the better. One window opened with steps into the garden. The middle window was the one regarding which there had been a mistake, which had now been set right. It jutted out, and in the little nook which it formed, a writing-table and chair had been placed, with all appliances for comfort. As Henry looked out, he remembered Mrs. Elliott's request to know the day of Nora's arrival.

He sat down in the tempting spot, pulling up the blind for better light, and wrote his few words. When he had done, he looked about for an envelope, but though every kind of luxury had been thought of, this little necessary was

wanting. He folded up his paper, therefore, in the form of a letter, lit the little taper and sealed it. Remembering then that he must hurry to catch the post, he drew down the blind, blew out the candle, looked back carefully to see that all was safe, and hurried off to the village, a short quarter of a mile off, where he lodged. It was the last he ever saw of the pretty drawing-room.

CHAPTER IX.

HENRY was awakened, having gone to bed early, tired, like the rest of the world, and, like the rest, impatient for morning, by the sound of the workmen's bell.

"I seem only just to have gone to sleep," he thought, yawning, and turning his head to rest again. "Oh! Roberts!" as the bell rang on and on, "you will crack our ears. Do be still!" and he put his head under the clothes.

But the bell rang on, and Henry, now

thoroughly awakened, looked out into the room—it was quite dark.

“Why, what can the matter be?” he cried, darting out and opening the shutters; and then stood for one moment transfixed and amazed with horror. The night was day with the great flame that went up from Nora’s house.

His clothes were on in one second, and he flew along till he reached the spot, pausing only at a house where several workmen lodged to shout “Fire! fire!”

He was almost the first on the spot. The bell had been rung by a watchman when he discovered the fire, and the few who had assembled seemed bewildered. Henry had to collect his scattered senses, and organize an effective mode of overcoming the flames. Mrs. Ratcliffe and all the inmates of that portion of the house were

safe, and, as the wind set in an opposite direction, the only danger to the old part was from the sparks and bits of timber that flew about. But in the new building the fire had got the upper hand. The roof was cracking, and the flames were blazing all down the front of the house at least, and it required violent action to over-master the conflagration.

James Field arrived shortly after Henry, and, being more experienced, and having attended many fires in London, was more useful. Some preparations in the possibility of such an event had been made, and when once the arrangements were organized, it was soon apparent that the flames would be got under. Long before morning dawned the worst was over; but the first rays of light disclosed the mere shell of a house.

The work of so many months was destroyed.

When all danger was over, sore, bruised, burnt and black, Henry returned to his lodgings to wash and dress; and then, ordering his horse, rode off to Mr. Powderham, who lived about seven miles from Riddlemere.

He was broken-hearted. No one seemed to have any idea when or how the fire had broken out. He could not blame himself for any negligence, but he felt that the building was under his charge, and that under his charge this misfortune had occurred. He would not indulge himself by making an inquiry under his own auspices; he thought it his duty to go first and inform Mr. Powderham of the event, and then act under his authority.

Had he not been, as usual, hasty in his actions and decisions, he would have found that James Field had already despatched a messenger to Mr. Powderham; and before Henry, riding hard across country, had reached his house, that gentleman, driving much more leisurely along the high road, had arrived at Riddlemere.

His first step was an inquiry into the cause of the fire. As he trotted along the road, although shocked, certainly very much shocked at the accident, he could not refrain from an exultant "Ah! who was right? I knew how it would be!" And the ardent desire that this firm conviction might prove the right one, made him set about the inquiry in a spirit of opposition to Henry. He was so sure he had been negligent

that he wished him to have been so.

James Field suggested the inquiry the moment he arrived. He gave a very good reason.

“People have not yet had time to think. You will hear the truth if you take them before they have puzzled themselves with thought.”

Mr. Powderham agreed, and sat down at once in Mrs. Ratcliffe’s little private room to hear the evidences that could be given.

Henry was absent. This was James Field’s reason for hurrying it on. His real conscious reason. Mr. Powderham had no such conscious reason. He really did not wish or mean to be unfair; but owing to the state of his mind regarding Henry, he did say to himself, “We shall get at the truth better in his

absence. He is too excitable for calm inquiry."

Mr. Powderham sat down, and James Field stood behind him. A very few words from the watchman who had discovered the fire having proved that it originated in or near the new drawing-room, Mrs. Ratcliffe was called. Mrs. Brook, however, said her aunt had been so tired with her exertions all night, that she had persuaded her to rest; she could give information equally well.

"Who, as far as you know, Mrs. Brook," asked Mr. Powderham, "was the last person that went into the new drawing-room?"

"I believe, sir, it was me myself; and yet, sir, I am very sure I did no mischief, for I went in when it was broad day."

"Do you mean that you shut the shutters in broad daylight?"

“I did not shut the shutters, sir, but I shut up the room. It was a little before seven. I will tell you, sir, how it was. My aunt put off our tea till after Miss Smith should come. When she did not come we were too much disappointed to be in a hurry to take it, and we did not have it till just upon seven ; meaning, as we felt tired like, to go early to bed.”

“And you shut the shutters of the rooms before tea?”

“Not the shutters, sir ; but I went round the rooms and shut them up, shut the doors, and drew down the blinds, and made sure that all was right before we sat down to our tea.”

“And do you never shut the shutters at night?”

“Yes, sir, in a general way ; but for

the last week Mr. Devereux ordered the windows to be kept wide open all night. He fancied there was a smell of paint and plaster, and he said that was the best way to get rid of it."

Mr. Powderham put up his eyebrows.

"I should have thought Mrs. Ratcliffe was the best judge of that. It seems a curious order to give. Supposing it came on to rain in the night, what then?"

"Oh! sir, there was the watchman. He had particular orders to see to it; and Mr. Devereux gave him sixpence a night additional all these nights past, to be on at nine instead of half-past ten. But, indeed, sir, there has been no fear of rain for ten days, or more."

"And was the watchman on at nine last night?"

"Well, sir, I am afraid he was not.

When Miss Smith was to come, Mr. Devereux told him he need not be on till the usual time. When she did not come, Jenkins says he went down to him to tell him to come up here as before, and Jenkins said he would; but he had a little engagement, and he called in to a friend on his way up, and he did not get here till past ten. He owned it to me himself; but he knew, he says, there would be no rain, and he never thought of any damage."

"And when Jenkins came up he saw no appearance of fire—that is what I think he said—but saw it later?"

"Yes, sir. He told me he walked about as usual, and he saw a bright light in the new drawing-room, and he thought to himself that Miss Smith was come after all. Now, sir, a person like

him has no business to think, not in a general way, and so I told him."

"I quite agree with you," observed Mr. Powderham, with a dry smile.

"And then, sir, he sat down facing the road, and took his pipe as usual; and then he smelt a smell; and then he looked up and saw sparks; and then he ran round, and the front of the house, sir, he said, was the most beautiful sight, all the windows like a fairy palace. It was too late then; the flames had got the masters; and he ran under our windows and shouted 'Fire! fire!' And my aunt jumped up as quick as thought and called 'Ring the bell!' And that, sir, is how it all was."

"Very good, Mrs. Brook. But now the question arises, did anybody go into those rooms after nightfall? Who have

you in the house besides yourself and Mrs. Ratcliffe?"

"Only Hannah, sir, an under-housemaid, and my little girl. Miss Smith was particularly anxious to have everything quiet, and no great bother of servants, till she had looked about her; and we said we could do very well, and indeed better in a general way, without further help, except, indeed, a charwoman, which——"

Mrs. Brook, in her regard for Nora's honour, was hurrying to explain all the ins and outs of the case, but was brought back by Mr. Powderham.

"Never mind about that. You say there was Hannah and your little girl. Where is Hannah?"

"Here, sir," said a voice; for Hannah, on the tiptoe of curiosity, had stationed herself outside.

“Very well. And your little girl; call her. She is the most likely person to have been in fault.”

“She can’t have been in fault, sir, for she was sitting at tea with Mrs. Ratcliffe and me, and she went early to bed. She’s asleep, sir, just now, for she was terribly upset by the night we had; but I’ll wake her, sir, if you think proper.”

“No need to wake Sophy,” said Hannah. “I saw a person go into the rooms after you shut them up, mum.”

There was a universal cry of curiosity from within and without the room, and a “Speak out, girl,” from Mr. Powderham.

“Yes, sir. It was Mr. Devereux,” said Hannah. “I saw him go in, and shut the doors after him.”

“Indeed!” cried Mr. Powderham, sur-

prised. "And at what time was this?"

"About seven, sir. Just upon getting dark. And I daresay he took his cigar in with him, and one of them nasty sparks getting about, may have done all the mischief."

"Certainly they may," Mr. Powderham said, very gravely. "Go and see, Field, if Mr. Devereux has returned. Say I should be glad to speak with him."

This supposition of Hannah's was a perfectly gratuitous piece of ill-nature, for she certainly had seen no cigar, nor could have done so, as Henry never smoked. But Hannah, though not an ill-natured girl in general, had a grudge against Henry, and could not resist the opportunity of showing it. The reason of her grudge was this: She had a lover among the workmen; one, at least, whose atten-

tions she was for the present admitting. This lover of hers had been caught by Henry in a small act of dishonesty. As the man bore a good character in general, Henry had been very lenient; had forgiven him, and concealed his offence; but he had spoken sharply, as was his wont, and had threatened instant dismissal if there should be a second offence. The man, who was of a sullen disposition and did not forgive, was one of the few who disliked Henry, and he poured his griefs into Hannah's breast. Hannah, hearing the case through her lover's medium, called Henry "a meddling upstart, and she'd tell him so to his face some day." With singular delight she therefore threw out her fact and her supposition.

Heated and vexed, Henry, just returned from his fruitless ride, was found by James

Field, and the message was delivered.

“Immediately,” James Field said irritatingly, as Henry paused a moment to look with pity at the state of the horse from which he had just dismounted.

He made no reply, but tossed the bridle to a man who stood near, and saying “Look to him,” walked off. He did not speak, but a storm was swelling in his breast. He felt ill-used, though he hardly knew why.

Mr. Powderham bowed coldly. “I want to ask you a few questions, Mr. Devereux. It appears, from the inquiries I have made, you were the last person who went into the new drawing-room last night.”

Henry looked thunderstruck. “Who says I was?” he asked quickly.

Mr. Powderham told him what had been said by Mrs. Brook and Hannah; and then added, “Now, if you please, collect your-

self, and endeavour to speak quietly. I wish to ascertain a few facts. It has been suggested that you may have taken a cigar with you."

"And who on earth can have made so ridiculous a suggestion!" exclaimed Henry with heat. "Anyone who knows me, and there are plenty who do, may know that I never smoke. I hate it; it makes me sick. And if," he added, his voice rising—for the poor youth was losing his command of himself—"I smoked a thousand cigars a day, does anyone in his senses suppose that I should go and smoke it in Miss Smith's drawing-room."

"Compose yourself," said Mr. Powderham with that kind of manner which is like throwing water on a fire. "I simply said it had been suggested. One word of denial was enough. But now, will you be so good

as to collect yourself and tell us what passed when you were in the drawing-room."

"I wrote a letter," he said ; his heart sinking as he felt, however certain he might be that he had done no injury, that he should never convey this certainty to others—"wrote it and sealed it." The sinking of his heart had stilled him. He spoke quietly now.

"Wrote a letter and sealed it, sir. Good gracious !" exclaimed Mrs. Brook. "Did you light a candle, then !"

"Don't interrupt us, good woman," said Mr. Powderham. "But you hear the question, Mr. Devereux, and I repeat it. Did you light a candle?"

"Yes," he replied. "Mrs. Elliott desired me to let her know if Miss Smith did not arrive. I forgot this till it was nearly post time. I remembered it when I saw Miss Smith's writing-table. I sat down and

wrote, but could find no envelope. I therefore lit the little taper and sealed my letter. I then blew out the candle; and not only blew it out, but I remember looking particularly to see if it was well out and all safe. I am always afraid of fire. I have had an especial terror of it upon me for ten days past. The watchman knows how I have spoken to him on the subject." He said all this calmly.

"And what happened to the lucifer-match?" asked James Field, breaking a pause that followed Henry's explanation.

"Ah! yes—what happened to the lucifer-match?" Mr. Powderham repeated.

"The lucifer-match," cried Henry, excited again. "I am sure I forget. I tossed it out of the window, I think. What can a lucifer-match do when all the fire is out of it."

“I am sorry to say, Mr. Devereux, that I think your explanation very unsatisfactory—I mean so far as to exculpating yourself. I am afraid there can be no doubt that a spark was left smouldering, which spark has caused all this mischief. I am extremely sorry to say it, but I fear we must conclude you are the author of the ill.”

“Of course, sir,” Henry said, not so respectfully as he ought, “if you say it was my spark, I cannot help myself. I suppose it is possible—just possible. I have no proof, nor can have, to gainsay you except my assurance, and therefore the blame must lie on my shoulders. I may think it hard, but I must submit.”

“I do not think it hard, Mr. Devereux. It appears to me that in many ways you have shewn great negligence; but we

need not discuss them here. This matter may be considered as settled."

Henry deigned to say no more. He turned round with a swelling heart, and walked off.

While Mr. Powderham was saying a few words to James Field, Mrs. Ratcliffe entered. Sophy followed her, looking pale and scared from the terrors of the night. Mrs. Ratcliffe had only just discovered what was going on, and was extremely angry with her niece for the care which had prevented her from taking a part in the inquiries. She was also much vexed at the turn those inquiries had taken, and she expressed a few words of doubt on the matter.

Mr. Powderham, having now made up his mind, was not going to stand a doubt; and very forcibly, and in very good plain

language, he stated the case as he supposed it to have taken place. He thought a spark had fallen somewhere in the matting, and had smouldered there for a time—burning, not blazing; that it had reached at last the muslin curtains, which had blazed up and then died out, leaving a smouldering fire in the light wooden rods, which, until the room was finished, had been put up for the support of the curtains-rings; this in course of time had communicated with the roof, where the fire had principally raged, and finally all had been burnt.

Mrs. Ratcliffe was awestruck, and Sophy listened with wide open eyes.

“Poor, poor young gentleman!” was, however, Mrs. Ratcliffe’s pitying observation; “to think of his having got himself into such a scrape!”

Sophy began to cry.

“What is the matter, little girl?” said Mr. Powderham, paying his tribute to beauty by an attention he would never have paid to an ugly girl.

“She is very fond of Mr. Devereux, sir,” explained Mrs. Ratcliffe. “She is sorry for him, and I could cry myself, too, to think of it.”

“I am sorry for him also, but it was a terrible piece of negligence; and what the cost of it all will be it is impossible to say. But I think, Mrs. Ratcliffe, instead of being sorry for Mr. Devereux, we ought to be thankful to Providence that the event was no worse. You might have been burnt in your beds. Think of that, little girl. It is dreadful to see what carelessness may do.” He spoke very awfully.

“That is true, sir. Don’t cry, Sophy; we ought to be very grateful to be alive.”

But Sophy still cried bitterly, and Mr. Powderham, offended at her reception of his notice, paid no further attention. He settled with Mrs. Ratcliffe how the remaining rooms should be arranged for Miss Smith, and the conferences broke up.

CHAPTER X.

HENRY walked away in a whirl of mingled passions—resentment mingled with wounded feelings; and one added force to the other. He had worked all night, perilling life without a care, but no word had been said on this subject. He had hastened over, weary and hungry, to confess all to Mr. Powderham, and advantage had been taken of his absence to get up stories against him. The sense of unfairness and ill-usage made his heart smart and bleed; the impossibility of coping with the unfairness maddened him.

Those who have been born fiery and sensitive may imagine the feelings of impotent resentment and desire of revenge that swept through his mind, adding to the inward tumult by the very consciousness of their impotency. But most men, either from principle or obedience to common laws of society, govern those feelings, instead of allowing them to be the governors. But Henry, unfortunately, had yielded too little to control, knew too little the duty or the importance of self-mastery, to be able to reason when agitated. His mind lost its balance, and before he reached his lodgings he had determined to throw up his situation.

“Why had he ever taken it? Why had he ever exposed himself to the insults of underlings?—to the oppression of masters? Why had he ever thought it pos-

sible that a connexion—any connexion—with his house's enemy could bring good luck with it. He renounced it at once and for ever. Better be a common workman, a railway navvy, than bear what he had had to bear."

He was exhausted with want of food when he got to his lodging, for he had had nothing during the work of the night, or the ride of the morning, and he called for some breakfast. The refreshment of his bodily powers in some degree soothed his mind, but did not alter his resolution; and after breakfast he began to sort out his papers and tear his letters.

In the course of his hurried inspection he opened Nora's letter to himself, and as his eyes fell on the first few sentences a softer mood stole over him.

He did not change his views, but the mood of mind changed. He would still resign, but he would not throw his resignation with bitter words in Mr. Powderham's face; he would see Nora, and calmly yield up to her the office she had entrusted to him. This decision stilled and calmed him, and restored him to a sense of dignity. Possibly even without allowing it, a something in the future which might stay the offer of resignation floated dimly and consolingly before him; but it was not consciously seen.

He hurriedly put back his papers, only half sorted and arranged, and went up to the house to see what was going forward. He was calmed, but his mood of mind was still sensitive, and everything conspired to add to this sensitiveness. He found all the workmen

busily at work, and no notice was taken of him as he stood by. This was but natural, since Mr. Powderham was supreme, and had given his orders; but Henry felt none the less overlooked. At last he asked if Mr. Powderham was gone. The man said he thought not. He thought he was going to stay to receive Miss Smith.

This was natural, but it was another blow to Henry.

“Where is Mr. Field?” he asked next.

There was something going on—a letter or messenger being sent to Miss Smith, the man said. He thought he was gone to find one.

Henry had intended to be this messenger himself. He felt every way baffled. He wandered into the house, no longer daring

to take on himself to make arrangements for Nora's reception; but did not find comfort there. All indeed were kind; even Hannah, now that she saw the look of misery on his handsome face, was repentant for her spiteful speech. But one and all seemed to look on him as the culprit—as without any doubt the culprit; and a feeling, a reasonless one, but a feeling of kindness and chivalry, made him bear it bravely, and not attempt to shift the blame to other shoulders. Finding little comfort therefore in the house, he turned away. As he left the kitchen, where he had found Mrs. Ratcliffe, Sophy, beginning to cry, slipped her hand into his.

“Poor little thing!” he said, patting the little hand. “Were you very much frightened?”

“She was terribly frightened, sir,” said

Mrs. Ratcliffe, "but I think she frets most for you. She don't like to have you blamed."

"Poor little thing!" he said, much touched. He stooped and kissed her; but feeling overmuch softened by the unexpected kindness, dropped her hand and strode away.

Sophy gasped a sob, and then sat down again and cried silently.

As Henry returned to his lodgings, he met James Field. "Where do you come from?" he asked shortly.

"Mr. Powderham has written to Miss Smith. A messenger is to go with the letter to the Junction. That will save her a surprise when she arrives."

"I meant to go to the station to meet her."

"So do I," said James Field, with a stately manner, "and so does Mr. Powder-

ham; but still it was right to prepare her."

"Who is going?"

"Thornhill. He is just off, but you can catch him if you have a private message to send."

"I have none." That word "private," pronounced in a peculiar tone of irony, made his flesh creep. "I shall be at the station," he said, and walked on.

The storm was renewed within.

He set to work again upon his papers, now and then looking at his watch. His horse was tired, and he must walk to the station, which was six miles off. He determined to do it leisurely, and not arrive heated and excited. The weather was hot, and the sun very powerful; he did not mind this in general, but his mind was set on this reception at the station, and his appearance there assumed an enormous im-

portance in his eyes. Not his personal appearance in any conceited sense; that for which he felt anxiety was for the dignity and self-possession of his air and manner.

He wished to be at the station by five. A little before three a message was brought him that a workman wished to speak to him. He went down and found a man, who, with an agitated manner, began to tell him that he had been suspected of stealing a fellow-workman's tools.

"Now, sir," he said, "the tools was taken between three and four yesterday afternoon; that is owned by Thorpe himself; and how could I have taken them when I was not there? You knows well, sir, that you sent me to Dollington," naming the nearest town.

"Yes, I sent you. It was to get a piece of velvet for the chimney-piece of the unfortunate room."

“Yes, sir. It is four good miles to Dollington, and I brought it you back at four o’clock ; you knows that.”

“Yes, I am sure of it ; and I did not give you the commission till after your dinner. All right ; you can prove it is a mistake.”

“No, sir, that’s what I can’t do ; for it seems nobody missed me ; or they won’t say as they did. I’ve got a bit of a temper, sir, and I’m not a popular man, and they don’t care to see me down ; but I value my character, sir, and I can’t put up with this.”

“Then you want me to prove it ?”

“Yes, sir. I’ve got to be hauled before the magistrate, Squire Lubbock, this evening, and if there’s nobody to speak for me, I shall be hauled to prison ; and, sir, I value my character, and if you be so good, I can’t put up with it.”

Henry's countenance fell.

"What time are you to go?"

"I am to be at Squire Lubbock's at half after five; and if you, sir, will be so good as to meet me there, you may get me out of this scrape, and I shall be for ever grateful to your honour."

"Well, my good man, I can't refuse you," Henry said. "I know what it is to be wrongfully accused. Though I would rather be shot, and shoot you, too," he added, using in his excitement one of those foolishly forcible expressions which did him so much injury. "I will do a good turn when I can. Go. I will meet you."

"Thank ye, sir," and the man went away.

Henry was forced to change his plans. Mr. Lubbock was a squire who lived in

an opposite direction to the station, three or four miles over the heath. He was there by half-past five, but was kept waiting for nearly an hour, and it was past half-past seven before the business was well over, and he was at home again. He thought it too late to intrude on Nora.

“What will she think of me?” he said, as he sat dreary and distracted in his lodgings. “But it shall all be ended to-morrow morning. I’ll be off from this unfortunate place before another sun has set.”

CHAPTER XI.

MR. POWDERHAM drove in a little dog-cart to the station, and finding James Field was bent on going, he offered him a lift. If he had not chosen Field and put him in his place, he might not perhaps have selected him as a companion. But from that opinion he had of himself, he was thoroughly loyal to the objects of his selection; and as a man or woman in love invests an object with charms which others fail to see, so he cast over Field the charm of his own choice—saw that, and was satisfied.

It must also, however, be owned that James Field was quick-witted. He made himself well master of anything he had to do, and, when he chose, could offer, in a very deferential, unpresuming manner, valuable suggestions. As they drove along, the subject was the rebuilding of the house; and so pleased was Mr. Powderham with the intelligence of his companion's conversation, that he inwardly determined he would stand no more nonsense. Nora might say what she pleased, but Field should have the sole charge of the building. He had perhaps suffered the interview at Cheltenham to fade out of his memory.

They reached the station in good time, and stood conversing on the platform.

The railway to the Spa was a branch.

A man had been sent to the Junction to meet Nora with Mr. Powderham's letter. This she had received. It was a kind letter, breaking to her the unfortunate event. The writer entered into few particulars, but said he feared it was owing to a degree of negligence on the part of Mr. Devereux.

To say that Nora was not shocked and grievously disappointed at the event, would be saying too much. She was so, undoubtedly; or would have been so, had not another sensation prevented the disappointment from being, in the first instance, felt. Miss Willis shed tears of dismay, but Nora was absorbed in another view of the question—pity for Henry. During the short run from the Junction to the Spa, where a carriage was to meet her, and where Mr. Powderham had said "*We shall be,*" the

thought of seeing Henry, of shewing him how cheerfully she could contemplate the loss, entirely occupied her mind.

The train slowly came to a pause, and she looked eagerly out of the window. There stood Mr. Powderham and a stranger. The disappointment was so great that she, still as hitherto absorbed in the interest of the moment, could not conceal it. Both Mr. Powderham and James Field saw and felt the look with which her eye wandered down the platform, and how it gradually stiffened as it returned to where they stood.

She met Mr. Powderham, however, graciously, and spoke as cheerfully as she had intended about the loss; but when, after conversing for a few minutes, he said, "I do not know anything of Mr. Devereux, but Mr. Field has accompanied me to pay his duty and express his regrets," the haughty

spirit rose up in opposition. She had not time to think much, but the natural woman said within, "He is forcing him upon me; Mr. Field is forcing himself upon me as a relation; they are keeping my cousin in the background, and I *will not* have it!" and the bow which was returned to James Field's obsequious bow was a chilling one.

If human beings were conscious of the effects sometimes caused by inadvertent words and actions, they would very early learn to curb and subdue themselves. A cold look, may in certain senses, actually do murder; it may kill what is good, and leave the soul thus deadened to follow its evil thoughts. Nora's haughty bow had some such bad effect on James Field. He had an evil thought in his head, but it was as yet only a thought; had he been graciously received, it might have been smothered.

That chilling inclination of the head made his baleful envy of Henry take full possession of his mind.

After a very short conversation, Nora entered her carriage to drive home, and Mr. Powderham re-entered his and trotted after her. He would be there, he said, as soon as she was, an attention for which she tried in vain to be grateful.

After they had trotted along for some little way without exchanging a word, James Field broke the silence abruptly.

“Do you really think, sir, that the fire was owing to negligence on the part of Mr. Devereux?”

“Yes, I do,” Mr. Powderham replied with heat, for he had now taken up this opinion and made it dear. He was not going to allow it to be controverted. “What have you got to say against it?”

“Only, sir, that I do not think it was from *negligence*.”

“How do you mean?” he asked, arrested by the emphasis.

“It is a difficult thing to say or to explain; but I have formed a different opinion. I think it was premeditated.”

“Take care, Field,” Mr. Powderham said gravely, “you are making a very serious charge.”

“Of course I am, sir—a very serious one. I know to what I expose myself; to enmity and dislike, if I am unable to prove it, not only from Mr. Devereux, but from those who favour him. Nevertheless, as I am in some degree trusted here, I must do my duty; and as I have formed this opinion, I mention it to you, sir, to set you on your guard.”

“You are quite right,” Mr. Powder-

ham said ; but he did not speak readily. He was very much shocked ; nay, distressed. It was so very serious a charge, that even his dislike to Henry could not make him take it up willingly. He liked to be in the right, and was not sorry to prove others to be in the wrong ; but he did not wish to find them criminals.

“If my reasons were not strong I should not have named the idea. I have been debating all day—ever since, at least, I formed the opinion—whether I should speak or not ; at length I have decided that I cannot do otherwise.”

“You are right. But I should be glad to hear the reasons for so strange an idea before I form an opinion myself.”

“You must know, sir, that the idea

came into my head during the inquiry this morning. There seemed some very curious circumstances connected with Mr. Devereux. I need hardly name them, as I saw they caught your attention; in fact it was, I believe, from your countenance that I gathered my own impression."

"You mean the open windows, and the absence of the watchman," Mr. Powderham said, not displeased to think of his impressive countenance.

"Yes, sir, and the singular visit to Miss Smith's drawing-room at that hour of the day."

"True, very true. I certainly thought the circumstances of the case very singular. Yet I own I should hardly——"

"No, sir, it was not likely you should form the opinion I have formed. It

was indeed impossible you, or any one else, should do so. It required a different sort of evidence. The idea did, however, even then enter *my* head, in consequence of my knowledge of the feelings of Mr. Devereux for Miss Smith. You perhaps remember the strange expression he one day used regarding her."

"I do, I do," Mr. Powderham said hurriedly. "I thought it a piece of folly, owing to some quarrel between you."

"No, sir, we have had no quarrels; but he has allowed me and all about here to know his feeling on the subject. Freely, before the workmen, he has called her his enemy."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. It was owing to my know-

ledge of this that the idea struck me; yet I should hardly have entertained it, had it not been for the accidental finding of a letter which threw some light on the subject. Are you acquainted, sir, with Mr. Devereux's father?"

"Not in the least; nor do I wish to be so."

"No, sir. There is nothing desirable in his acquaintance; but it is necessary you should know the kind of man he is. He hates Miss Smith with a deadly hatred; he does not disguise it. He thinks she stands between him and wealth, which indeed she does. But he is not hot-headed like Mr. Henry Devereux. He is one of the sharpest and coolest men I know, and he guides his family with an iron bridle. The letter I have

accidentally found is from him to his son."

"And what is its purport?" asked Mr. Powderham, with anxious curiosity. "Have you got it about you?"

"No, sir, for I had not made up my mind when I left home as to what I should do. It required thought. The letter is vaguely worded, but certainly seems, as I understand it, to contemplate some accident; it expresses most deadly hatred to Miss Smith."

"I always knew this appointment would bring mischief and annoyance," Mr. Powderham said, pathetically. He did feel very seriously annoyed at the business before him. "You must bring this letter to me to-morrow morning. I have a lawyer staying with me, and we will consult him on the subject. We

must be very careful in bringing such a charge."

"No doubt, sir. I have spoken only to you."

"When did you find the letter?"

A tinge of colour came into James Field's cheeks.

"When you sent me to find a messenger, sir, I thought I would call and tell Mr. Devereux what I was doing. I went to his lodgings, and, to my surprise, found he had spent the morning in tearing letters and papers. The room was in disorder, but he was absent. As I left the house, I suppose one of the torn letters clung to my clothes, for Mrs. Bowers's girl ran after me, and said I had dropped a letter at the door. I took it from her and opened it, and seeing it was torn in two, was going to

tear it up and throw it away, when my eye fell on some very remarkable words. I then kept it, sir, and have got it to show you. No sooner did I see the words than the idea which had presented itself became a fixed opinion. I have now done my duty. It is for you to decide what should be done further."

"You shall come to me to-morrow morning. It is a very serious charge; yet I confess the circumstances are exceedingly suspicious."

"I think so, or I should not have spoken."

There was not much more between Mr. Powderham and his companion. On approaching Riddlemere he dropped him, and drove on alone to receive Nora, whose carriage he had passed almost

immediately after leaving the station.

On her arrival he showed her all things; explained to her how the fire arose, and entered a little into his views for the future. But he was not pleased with her, nor did he grow to love her. Not that on this occasion she showed any remarkable wilfulness, for her mind was too much pre-occupied to have any opinions about the future; but she did not listen to him with the hearty deference he approved. She was weary and disappointed; her eyes and her mind were wandering away from him, in the vain hope that Henry would appear; and his plans and explanations were inexpressibly tedious. She did try to be civil, but Mr. Powderham was too acute not to see that he had only a part of the woman at his disposal. He guessed

to what quarter the rest was gone, and did not feel amiable towards that quarter in consequence.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Nora was sitting at an early breakfast the following morning, a message was brought to her that Mr. Devereux would be glad to speak to her.

She was alone. Miss Willis had had a bad cold, which, having delayed the journey, was, in fact, the small cause of the great ill. The preceding day's journey had brought back the cold, and Nora had persuaded her to remain in bed. She was sitting in a little room which had been intended for a temporary dining-room; for the boudoir, though not seriously injured, was damaged by the fire. This little room

was dull and dark, but perhaps at the moment it was lucky it was so, as the stately footman who brought the message might otherwise have wondered at the brilliant colour which suddenly flushed the cheeks and brow, and even the hands of his mistress. Perhaps it did not altogether escape him even as it was; yet there were no signs of discomposure in the quiet voice with which Nora said, "Beg him to come in. I am quite ready."

When the door closed, however, she rose and tried by a movement to the window and back again to recover herself. She was conscious of feeling agitated at the interview; she was not surprised at so feeling, considering how they had parted, and how they met; but she would have been glad of more time to consider with what words she should greet him.

The mastering of her agitation prevented all preparation now, and when the door opened to admit him, her behaviour was at the mercy of chance.

The impulse of the moment was to go forward cordially with her hand extended ; but when she had moved a few steps in this spirit she paused, for there was no responsive forwardness on his part.

He stood at the door, grave and formal, with his hat in his hand ; and in answer to her movement, and scarcely murmured greeting, he merely inclined his head. When she paused, he, after an instant, made a movement and said,

“ I intrude too early, I know ; but my business is pressing. I ought to have seen you last night ; it was a circumstance I could not help which prevented me from trying at least to do so.”

"I hoped you would come," Nora said, her agitation somewhat stilled by his distant manner, "but it is not too early. I am quite at leisure. Will you sit down?" she added more timidly.

"I have but a few words to say, and will not detain you. You may guess a part of these words. I am, it seems,—I do not allow it,—I cannot understand it,—but I am, it seems, supposed to be the author of this unhappy accident; and I cannot disprove the supposition. You may guess what I feel, and what I would say; words cannot say it."

"My dear cousin," Nora said, forgetting all but her desire to console him, "let it be who it will, what can it matter to me? I am grieved for those who feel pain at the accident, but to me it is nothing. Except by setting to work to rebuild what has

been injured, let us think of it no more."

"You are very good," he said. There had been a tinge of colour in his cheek at her affectionate address; there was a slight tremble in his voice as he acknowledged her kindness; but that was all. He remained standing and immovable, and after a moment went on—

"Since you understand, then, what I would say, I will not dwell on that part of the subject. The rest shall also be quickly said. I am come to resign into your hands the office I have held. From you I received the trust, and to you I return it. I do so not ungratefully—believe me, not ungratefully."

"But why?" Nora cried, amazed. "Surely you mistake; surely you will think better of it. I had hoped to have your help——"

He shook his head.

“No. I could give no help now. I too had hoped I might assist in undoing the injury that has been done; but I have considered the point. When a man has fallen in estimation he can do no good. I have fallen, and I will stay no longer.”

The last words were said so sternly and resolvedly, that pleading seemed out of place. Nora was silent while considering what arguments to use, and before she spoke he went on—

“I have put together the few plans and papers that may be specially of use to you. The accounts are all in the office, and will, I think, be found correct. And now I wish you good-bye.”

There was a momentary pause, during which Nora looked up into his face, and

for a single instant their eyes met. The effects of that meeting were a strange inward tremble in the heart and the bodily frame of each—a strange inward feeling, whose outward expression was a hurried withdrawal of the glance, and a rush of blood to the cheeks. But each, too conscious of the effect on themselves, saw nothing of it on the other; and both equally alarmed at their sensations, and fearful of having them observed, recovered themselves with marvellous speed.

The effect of the sensation in Nora was to make her more dignified and self-possessed; less earnest, less affectionate than she might naturally have been.

“Good-bye, if it must be so,” she said.
“And thank you for all the trouble you have taken.”

She held out her hand half timidly.

He took it, but only for a second. Then putting down a parcel of papers on the table, he inclined his head as he had done on entering, and went.

He had already, with the inconsiderate haste with which he did all things, sent his luggage to the railway station, and he now hastened after it himself. Off he walked with lightning speed, never looking about him, nor allowing himself to think. Here he would not, ought not to stay; what would become of him he did not know, and for the moment he did not care.

CHAPTER XIII.

JAMES FIELD went over to Mr. Powderham, on the same morning, with the letter he had spoken of.

This letter was from Mr. Devereux to Henry, in answer to one from him. It was on some money business. When Henry accepted Nora's offer, Mr. Devereux had, after some difficulty, consented to advance him money for the payment of his little bills, on the condition that he should be repaid out of the first half year's salary. On receiving, therefore, his money, Henry had kept to the stipu-

lation. He had, however, a faint hope,—that hope which some men never fail to have, that certain persons will not act like themselves—that his father would not accept the payment, would, in short, excuse it; and even in repaying he threw out a slight hint that he might not be willing to receive it.

This hint Mr. Devereux either did interpret, or chose to interpret, as a doubt whether he would or would not accept the money earned from Nora, and his letter was addressed in that supposition. It began, therefore, in the usual style. It spoke of Henry's "hateful employment," of the degradation of working for what was his own; of Nora as an impostor, for pretending thus to give him his rights. This part of the letter ended in the usual manner, by

advising the taking of what was his own in any manner by which the infernal laws of England permitted him to get it. It was, in short, a statement of the case between them, couched in the most violent language. But it went further. After this matter had been disposed of, there came another sentence. "You say that Miss Smythe's house is nearly finished, and that she is shortly going to take possession. Were the elements of my mind, she should never set her foot in it. Some lightning should blast, or fire burn, before she should possess the fruits of iniquity."

This letter was dated ten days before the time we have reached. It had enclosed a receipt for Henry's money. He had, on receiving the letter, glanced at it anxiously enough, so much as to dis-

cover whether or not his little suggestion had been accepted. Seeing it was not so—seeing it contained nothing of interest or novelty—he laid it by (with the receipt), barely read. He saw, indeed, that it was a violent letter; but he imagined he knew every word. It was the language he had heard from his childhood—in which at one time he had in simple folly taken his part. If it made him shudder now, that new sensation was one which he dared not thoroughly sift. He merely glanced at it, therefore, and laid it by almost unread.

When he tore his papers, he took out this letter, and keeping the receipt, threw it with a passionate gesture on the floor—not from any remembrance of its actual terms, but from a feeling partly of

hatred to its sentiments, and partly of dissatisfaction with himself and the position in which he stood ; even with that service under Nora which at the moment seemed to have brought him misery.

He went out, leaving his work unfinished, not expecting that any visitor would enter his room, or, if he did, that he would find anything remarkable in it.

James Field had been curious about his disappearance during the morning. He wished to know what he was doing with himself, and he called on him to ascertain. On finding him out, he went up and looking about him, observed, with surprise, the appearance of disorder in the room.

Now it was during the inquiry, as he had said, that the thought presented itself that Henry *might* have set fire to

the house on purpose. Not that he *would* have done it; he knew well enough that he was incapable of such a purpose, but that the circumstances made the suspicion possible. The idea came into his head, and was received—not accepted, not rejected—but put away for further thought.

When he entered Henry's room, and perceived what he had been about, the idea suggested itself more strongly; and the evident haste with which he had torn his papers seemed to confirm the suspicion he had at first formed without sufficient evidence.

He looked about him, and saw among the torn papers the letter in Mr. Devereux's handwriting.

"There will be more evidence there, I guess," he thought, as he picked it

up, knowing well the way in which that gentleman usually expressed himself regarding Nora.

But he did not expect what he saw. He even trembled as he read; for he had not been anxious to discover any real evidence on which to found such a charge. Not that he was in reality deceived by the words. He, as well as Henry, knew the language of Mr. Devereux too well to be astonished at any violence; but the extraordinary fitness of the evil wish did amaze and shock him. It was in the first instance so much more than he wished, that he dropped the letter and made a step towards the door.

But then again he paused, and with the self-deception which is part of the villainy of some characters, he said internally something about his duty. He

would not decide, it must depend very much on circumstances; but if future events should give rise to further suspicion, that letter ought to be seen. He turned back and picked it up.

When he got downstairs he called the maid of the house, and desired her to tell Mr. Devereux he had called; and as he left her, he dropt the letter. She saw it, as he intended, and followed him to return it. He took it, and put it away for further consideration. Should Henry miss the letter he determined to own what he had done, giving as his reason its dangerous nature. Should he not miss it, he thought this explanation more agreeable than a confession that he had looked over another man's torn papers.

This was the letter that was pro-

duced for the inspection of Mr. Powderham.

He was extremely shocked. Not knowing Mr. Devereux, he could make no allowance for the language—could read it in no vague sense. He was shocked and astounded, and laid it, with the circumstances of Henry's behaviour, before his friend the lawyer.

This gentleman was just departing, and could not enter fully into the case. He told them they must take care what they were about; but for his part he thought the letter the most villainous production he had ever happened to read. He could believe *anything* of a father and son who corresponded in such terms.

Mr. Powderham was, on this day,

very busy, and had been summoned by a gentleman in an opposite direction to where Riddlemere lay. He desired James Field to say nothing; to go back and think well over all the circumstances, and to keep his eye on Henry. This last charge he repeated two or three times, not so much because he thought it necessary, as because he thought he ought to think it necessary. Notwithstanding his dislike to Henry, he found it difficult to work himself up to the belief that he was an incendiary. But he was working himself up.

When James Field returned, the first thing he heard was that Henry was gone. From the disorder of his room, he had supposed some such act to be in contemplation, but the promptitude

of the proceeding amazed him—the folly of it astounded him.

“It looks like a guilty conscience,” he said, trying to persuade himself that he believed what he said.

This first day spent by Nora in her new home was inexpressibly dreary. For many months her heart had been set on it, and it failed to bring the joy that had been anticipated. Miss Willis was ill, Mrs. Ratcliffe was ill, and little Sophy was ill. The two last had been thoroughly overset by the fire, their nerves agitated, and their bodies chilled. They passed the day in bed. The little room which had been made ready for Nora was dull; it looked to the north-east, and to the entrance where the workmen were engaged in setting the heaps of rubbish to rights. She was afraid of

going out for fear of meeting James Field, whom she saw among the workmen, and to whom she felt an intense dislike; within, if she spoke to Mrs. Brook, it was only to hear the story of the fire repeated. It was none of these things, however—for she was not one to fret at trifles—that caused the shadow to rest so wearily upon her new life. The source of pleasure had suddenly dried up.

Late in the day she was cheered by the arrival of Mrs. Elliott. When she was happy and busy she was not very tolerant of visitors; but the pleasure with which she welcomed a visitor on this dreary day, taught her better than words that the most self-reliant are not independent of the help of their fellow-creatures.

Mrs. Elliott had heard of the fire, but had not heard the particulars, and Nora had to relate all that she had gathered, of which she was already weary. The way in which the subject irritated her was very singular. Even speaking of it to kind Mrs. Elliott irritated her. The expressions of sympathy for her own loss and disappointment irritated her more than all.

“And so, in fact, I am in fault,” was Mrs. Elliott’s comment, after hearing the tale. “My unfortunate request! I daresay if the truth were known the foolish boy never blew out the candle at all, and there it is explained. A breath of wind at any moment may have blown the curtains to it.”

“They say he said he was sure,”

Nora replied, emphatically. "But it does not signify how it was done. It was a mischance; such as might happen to any of us."

"You must get away from all this mess and rubbish," said Mrs. Elliott kindly, struck by something weary and vexed in her tone. Pay me a visit. In a week or two things will look different."

"Thank you; but no. I will stay, now I am come. Besides, I have been looking about, and find I can make myself more comfortable. My bed-room is bright and cheerful; I can turn that into a sitting-room." Then suddenly thinking she had been ungracious, she added, "But I shall like to visit you later—when things are more settled."

"Perhaps you are right, and it will be best; and I will try and persuade that foolish Mr. Devereux to come down for some shooting."

There was a sudden bound in Nora's heart; a sudden brightening in the dull landscape of her life. She drew back her head into a corner while she said,

"Do you know, then, that he is gone?"

"Yes; somebody saw him at the station this morning, and told us of it. Foolish, foolish boy! My old man is very much vexed."

"I thought it hasty," Nora said.

"It is the most inconsiderate thing that ever was done. Mr. Elliott says it may cause all kinds of injurious reports.

When she got up and said she must

go, Nora said she wished to ask her advice upon a point. It was on the subject of James Field. She told her exactly the history of their relationship, and also the advice she had received from Mr. Fanshawe regarding her relations.

“I agree with him, and mean to follow his advice,” she said; “but he allowed that Mr. Field was in a different position. I do not quite know how to behave. I do not like his looks, and yet there he is. He is my mother’s first cousin.”

“I think,” Mrs. Elliott replied, after a little consideration, “that his position here may guide you for the present. You can be very civil, but the fact of the situation he holds will prevent intimacy. I quite agree with Mr. Fanshawe.

If, after a time, you find that Mr. Field is an educated man, and has the mind of a gentleman, you can assist him to rise a step or two higher."

"Will you be so very kind as to go with me to speak to him?" Nora said. "I think I ought, and yet I shrink from it. I was certainly cold to him yesterday, and I am sorry. I dislike his looks, but I would be friendly if I could. You will help me?"

Mrs. Elliott acquiesced; and on her way to her carriage, which stood beyond the disordered court, they made a circuit to where James Field and some workmen stood. Nora bowed as graciously as she could when they got near, and he then took off his hat.

"This has been a bad job," Mrs. El-

liott said, thinking it was easiest for her to speak.

“Yes; but it is well it was no worse.”

This was said in that peculiar disagreeable manner he had of throwing hidden meaning into his words.

“We are quite satisfied with the degree of badness,” Mrs. Elliott replied lightly, looking at Nora and smiling; but Nora felt irritated, and would not speak.

After a moment, however, she recovered herself, and asked,

“How long will it take to rebuild this, do you suppose?”

“Indeed I can’t say.”

“Not long, I should think,” said Mrs. Elliott; “the walls seem for the most part uninjured.”

“There must be a regular examination, ma’am, before we can tell.”

He did not seem interested in the question, and Mrs. Elliott was trying to think of something to say next, when he prevented her.

Looking full at Nora, he asked,

“Is it true, ma’am, that you saw Mr. Devereux before he left this morning?”

She felt her blood boil, and a glow rise in her cheeks.

“Yes, I saw him,” she answered coldly.

“I think you were the only person who did see him, ma’am.”

“I don’t know. I saw him.”

The impertinence of his manner was more than she could bear, and after wait-

ing for a moment uncertain, she turned to Mrs. Elliott,

“It is bad for you to stand, is it not? Let us go. Good evening,” she then forced herself to say, and they went.

“Proud vixen, I’ll spite you!” said James Field between his teeth.

“No, I certainly do not like his looks or his manner,” replied Mrs. Elliott to a strong expression of dislike on Nora’s part; “but you must make allowances. He feels awkward, and in trying to be easy, and show himself at his best, he does in fact show himself at his worst. You must wait awhile before you decide upon him.”

“I will try. I *must* try,” Nora added, “for the feeling I have against him is perfectly unchristian.”

“Is it not strange,” Nora thought sadly, as she walked homewards alone, “that between me and all my relations there seems to be an antipathy. Am I never to love as I wish to love! Is there, on the contrary, always to be war?” She paused a moment in her sad reflections, and her mind reverted to the morning, to that short meeting with Henry; and as it was presented before her, there came a glow to her cheek and a tingling sense of pleasure ran through her veins. “Had it been war—had there been antipathy there?” By her sensations it hardly seemed so. It is true Henry had been distant and formal; but had there been antipathy between them? She did not consciously answer herself, but a pink sunset glow which was stealing over the land-

scape was reflected in her own thoughts, and she re-entered the house cheerfully.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was in the middle of the following day that Nora received a message from Mr. Powderham. "If it was perfectly convenient he should be glad to be permitted to say a few words to her."

As she had been expecting him all the morning, the stately message amused her.

"Mr. Powderham's visits are to be looked on like angels' visits, I suppose," she said laughing to Miss Willis.

She was in very different spirits on this day from the last. The invalids, all except little Sophy, were up, and there were things

to be seen, and heard, and done. With Mrs. Ratcliffe's assistance the change of room had been effected, and there was now a sunny sitting-room. Nora was beginning to establish herself. In short, she was full of thoughts and hopes again.

Mr. Powderham came in with a very grave face and manner.

Wishing to be on more cordial terms with him, Nora drew his attention to her room, playfully pointed out its beauties and charms, and called upon him for approbation. It would not do. He remained wrapped in gravity, and she ceased her efforts with the reflection shooting through her mind, "It is impossible to make any one like me."

When she ceased to speak he said,

"The cause of my wishing to see you is to inform you of a very unpleasant circum-

stance. You must give me your attention for a moment."

"Certainly," Nora said; and moving a chair towards him, sat down herself. She was sorry to think of unpleasant circumstances, but she did not feel, as some would have done, alarm.

"It is on the subject of this fire. I told you that it was owing to negligence on the part of Mr. Devereux. I have now reason to change my opinion."

"It seems to me, Mr. Powderham," said Nora, with the decision of manner he so much disliked, "that it is much better to leave the fire alone. It is only a worry to ourselves and everybody else, to dwell on the causes. Unless, indeed," she added, with sudden recollection, "you have discovered that it was caused by an accident."

"I differ from you entirely, Miss Smith," he said with severity. "It is my duty to search into the cause of the event, and I am sorry to say I have reasons to believe it was from no accident whatever."

"How then?"

"I mean to say that I think it was a pre-meditated act."

"Indeed! and by whom?"

"By Mr. Devereux, of course."

"Oh! Mr. Powderham," and she laughed. The idea was so ludicrous that she did not even feel indignant.

He was irritated beyond measure. Her countenance plainly said to him, to *him*, "How ridiculous!" and he was offended.

"I am come on serious business, not on a laughing matter," he observed in his severest tone. "It is not my habit to

jest in affairs of this nature. I am come to make a grave charge against Mr. Devereux, and, unfortunately, I have only too good reasons to uphold what I say."

"Of course it is my duty to listen to whatever you have to say," Nora replied with spirit, "but you must not be angry if I tell you beforehand that nothing shall make me believe it."

"I will lay the whole case before you, madam," he said. "It is a very serious charge, and when first it was laid before me, I almost did as you do. I refused to believe it. But I have had reason to change my opinion."

"Who made the charge?" she asked, with quickness.

"Allow me to proceed in my own manner."

“Only one moment, Mr. Powderham. The charge is made, I guess, by Mr. Field. I should like to know this before I listen to your statement.”

“The charge is made by myself, on good evidence, or I should not have brought it before you. I am not in the habit of being guided by any man; least of all by those subordinate to me.”

“You said a charge was laid before you,” was on Nora’s lips, but an imploring look from Miss Willis made her suddenly cease to arrest him. Why would she not listen quietly to Mr. Powderham? She composed herself and said instead, “I am quite ready to listen to you patiently. I beg your pardon for my interruptions.”

She submitted, but incredulity was

visible in every muscle of her face. He read it there, and his belief gathered strength from her opposition.

Having mentioned these small particulars in Henry's conduct which seemed singular, he went on—

“These facts, of course, are nothing in themselves. I thought he had been officious, but I thought no more. Yet I own his behaviour on the morning after the events did not prepossess me. His replies were most unsatisfactory, and his manner was that of a person bewildered with passion. Knowing him to be a hot-headed and excitable young man, I excused it; but I cannot forget that it was like the manner of a guilty conscience. It was about an hour and a half or two hours after he left us, that, having decided on sending a messenger

to you, Mr. Field went to his lodging to inform him of the fact, and was astonished, as indeed I was when I heard of it, to find that he had already been engaged in tearing his papers and making preparations for a departure. For what reason I cannot imagine; unless this same guilty conscience made him unable to remain and meet you. You will remember that he did not accompany us to the station, and before I could return here the following morning he was gone. Why this avoidance, this resolute determination to be seen no more? Why, but because he was unable to face the questions to which he might naturally have been exposed."

"He gave me a different reason," Nora interrupted. "I do not say it

was a good one; I think it was a hasty one, but it was a real reason. He seemed to feel that he was no longer looked upon in a proper light—no longer looked up to; as in his position he ought to be. That was his reason, and I can partly understand it.”

“It was only two hours after parting with me that his disordered room was found. There had been no time for him to make such a discovery. He had been alone during the morning. The reason is a very insufficient one.”

“Some people are very sensitive. Indeed, Mr. Powderham, I see no evidence. I am glad to say that, after following your story, I find it impossible to think otherwise.”

“Well, madam, I allow that all I have said is no evidence. It requires light to be

thrown on it before it becomes so. That light, I grieve to say, I have. I must trouble you to read this letter."

He took from his waistcoat-pocket the torn letter from Mr. Devereux, and laid it before Nora. He then sat with his hands clasped on the table, intently contemplating her.

If he wished to pain, if he wished to startle, if he wished to drive a sharp steel into her heart, he had succeeded at last. She sat staring at the words, when she had at last mastered them, while every tinge of colour faded from her cheeks. Once she looked up, and her lips moved, but they trembled, and she looked down again; yet in that glance the paleness of her skin spoke so forcibly of the pain within, that Mr. Powderham was melted. He was proud of his success, but grieved, really

grieved, for her. He was preparing some little speech, sympathizing, amiable, and consolatory. He had got it on his lips, and was about to form the words, when it was arrested.

She looked up again, and said steadily,

“But I do not believe it, Mr. Powderham, even now.”

“Is it possible!”

“I see they hate me!” she cried with bitter passion—“but I do not think them guilty of *this*. It is one thing to have a feeling in the mind, and another to act upon it.”

He was sorry for her, even though she argued with him. He could not help being sorry, and his voice was softer than was usual to him.

“When hate is cherished in the mind, my dear young lady, I believe no action to

be impossible. I laid that letter before a lawyer of talent. I would not decide upon it on my own judgment. He did not say, I confess, that it was evidence; but he said, and justly, ‘A father and son who can correspond in such terms *are capable of anything*’; and I agree with him.”

“It is dreadful,” Nora said; and she shivered.

“It is dreadful; and the more so because—at least, as I understand—there is no cause for such feelings.”

“Oh! no; no cause,” Nora said sadly, “except my birth. I ought not to have been born.”

“And that,” and Mr. Powderham, who, in his kindly mood, was facetious in tone, “is certainly not your fault. To the best of my belief, not only there is no cause, but there is very much the reverse. I cannot forget

the step which you took against my advice, and which—but no matter. I only mean to say, however mistaken, I think it was a step which was sufficient proof of your charitable feelings towards the family.”

He was now in extreme good-humour. The remembrance of how right he had been was like a ray of sunshine; and Nora’s subdued air was exactly what he had wished. Even in a little altercation that followed, he never lost his amiable compassion.

He was in a hurry, and he very shortly took his leave, saying he would return the following morning, as he had more to say to her. After wishing her good-bye, he put his hand on the letter.

“May I not keep it?” Nora said.

“No, madam; I cannot allow it to go out of my own hands. I will send you in a copy, if you please.”

“How came you to see the letter?” she asked suddenly.

“It was taken, singularly enough, to Mr. Field; it was among the torn papers on the floor in Mr. Devereux’s room. Mr. Field supposes he may have kicked it with his foot. On leaving the house, a maid, believing he had dropped a paper, took it to him.”

“And he read it?” Nora said. She shuddered as she thought of James Field, and for a moment an idea of a plot came into her mind. But it passed. There was the letter—what could undo the wording of that letter? It seemed to her that she was surrounded by villains.

“Of course he did so; he supposed it to be his own.”

“I do not see what right we have

to read it. It is a private letter. We ought never to have seen it; it is no concern of ours."

"On this subject I will not attempt to argue. Mr. Field laid the letter before me, and I, as is my duty, bring the subject before you. I will return and speak to you to-morrow, for I have more to say. I wish you good morning, madam," and bowing politely to her and Miss Willis, he went.

When he left her, Nora sat immovable. A great horror and darkness had come over her mind. Whether or not the suspicion was true, she had not had time to examine. It was scarcely in her thoughts. That of which she thought—that which subdued her to a lamb-like submission—was the knowledge of the deadly hatred she had inspired. She

had spoken of hate; she had known from Henry's violent speech that she was supposed to have wronged them—but the word hate had carried no impression to her brain. But there was the essence of hate, such as a demon might feel, in Mr. Devereux's letter, and it made her flesh creep. She was haunted by the words of the lawyer—"A father and son who can correspond in such terms are capable of anything." Was it possible that Henry had received and kept this letter—had cast it, as a light thing, among his waste papers? Was this the way in which, not only the father to the son, but the son to the father, wrote about her? *He*—there was the sting—he to whom Then she paused, pressing her hands on her brain to stay the thoughts that arose—

crushing down a something that seemed rushing up to madden her. She suddenly started up from the place where she sat, and at the same moment a letter was brought to her.

It was only an envelope from Mr. Powderham, containing a copy of the letter. She handed it to Miss Willis, saying, "Read it," and then stood watching her.

Its effect on Miss Willis—the mildest of human beings—was so evident, the shock so great, that Nora, even in the midst of her keener sensations, smiled.

In her commenting on the subject, however, she dwelt so much on her own birth as making misery and crime, that Miss Willis was much troubled. She spoke out with warmth some of her own views of life. Among other things she said, how could

Nora know that she had not been born expressly to stand between her cousins and guilt? Who could tell whether riches would not have been poison to them? Who could tell whether it was not intended that she should overcome their evil by good?

Nora heard her almost without hearing her, and yet her words made an impression; and as the day wore on, especially the last suggestion made an impression. If there *was* all this evil and hate, she *would* overcome it by persistence in good offices. Nothing, not even that letter should move her to resentment. She would think of it no more. Henry should never know that she had seen it. It, as well as all other things connected with this event, should be buried in oblivion.

This was the resolution she formed before she slept, and she held to it the more resolutely because her heart was sore and sad. That Henry should have received such a letter and kept it!

But her resolution was not Mr. Powderham's plan. He, on the contrary, had made up his mind that it was his duty to bring the matter before the public. He did not, indeed, think the evidence conclusive, but he thought it extremely suspicious. He came on the following morning to tell Nora that he intended to lay the affair before Mr. Lubbock the magistrate. He did not begin by telling her that he intended her to prosecute; but such was his intention.

She received his information with a

simple assurance that she had made up her mind to think of it no more.

“But you must think of it, madam,” he said coldly. “Were a poor man suspected of such a deed we should not shield him. And why should we shield Mr. Devereux?”

“As to the deed,” she said, “it is nonsense—it is impossible! And were it ever so possible, who could prove it? Who can prove what is a man’s *thought*? It is ridiculous!”

“Unfortunately, madam,” he replied, “we can prove what has been in his thought. I omitted to tell you yesterday, wishing to save you pain, that Mr. Devereux has made no secret here of his feelings for you; twice to my knowledge, once in my hearing, he called you the enemy of his house.”

And he gave her a rapid but vivid picture of poor Henry's folly.

This was the unkindest cut of all. Hitherto, in spite of the letter, a something of internal conviction or suggestion had whispered that he was not of his father's mind; but here was proof positive that she was mistaken.

She sat so silent and subdued that Mr. Powderham was again melting towards her, when she again baffled him.

"His speaking so publicly of his feelings is a proof, I think, that of *this* deed he was not guilty. The feelings are bad enough, but let us leave them alone."

"We cannot, madam. It is our duty to notice them."

"For my sake leave them alone.

Why should all this enmity be made public."

"No private considerations, madam," he said, with pomp, "should interfere with public duty. I consider it a public duty to have the matter investigated. I have already written to Mr. Lubbock on the subject, and if he concurs with me, there must be a trial."

"A trial! Do you mean a regular trial."

"I do!"

"Do you mean to prosecute?"

"In your name, madam, I certainly do intend, should Mr. Lubbock encourage me to prosecute."

"But I do not consent. I refuse to prosecute," Nora said, with quickness.

He quite hated her for the ready

phrase, which she had somewhere read or heard, and coldly said,

“I believe you have no power to refuse ; but Mr. Lubbock will decide the point. He is absent, but will return this evening. “I shall see him to-morrow morning, after which I will return to you.”

“Remember,” Nora said, as he bowed, “that nothing but force, absolute force, shall make me do it.”

He paused in his bow, and said,

“May I ask, madam, for what reason you are so unwilling to act? If it was a poor man, should you be equally resolved?”

“I hope I should,” she said ; but her colour went and came for a moment, and in some inner yet unconscious

dread of showing agitation, she only added resolutely, "at any rate I am resolved now."

He bowed again, equally resolved.

CHAPTER XV.

HENRY, meanwhile, had arrived in London in some elation of mind. There is a common expression of a person's being "on his high horse," and he was on the high horse as he travelled from Riddlemere homewards. He thought he had acted with spirit and dignity. What he had done he had done with passionate impulse; but looking back on his conduct, it struck him as being dignified. He admired himself; he hoped others would admire. Above all, one. He did not name her; he did not allow his thoughts to frame the

idea consciously; but there ran and tingled about his veins a pleasurable sense of joy in the feeling that she would admire the spirit of his conduct.

It was in this mood that he went home, and he was altogether in good spirits. Careless and affectionate, five months' absence had washed from his memory all unpleasant thoughts connected with his home; and bestowing on it his own more amiable qualities, he fancied he should see and be seen with pleasure. He longed to kiss his mother, and hear her soft drawling voice; to tumble about a little sister of whom he was fond—in fact, to be at home again.

It was past ten before he got in, and at the first aspect of the party in the drawing-room his fair hopes faded;

he began to dismount from his steed, and instead of elation of mind, to feel uneasiness and doubt.

His sister's sharp "Didn't I say it was Henry's bell? Nobody but Henry would make such a noise!"—his father's silent stare of surprise—and his mother's "Oh! Henry, why didn't you let us know?" were all so like his old receptions, that the illusions absence had fostered faded away.

Not even his mother's fond embrace, none the less fond because of the peevish speech, could do away the impression. He felt blank, and sat down hardly knowing how to explain his return.

But Letitia was really very glad to see him, and her questions, rapidly poured out, soon drew from him a history of

the fire. And as he detailed the events of the night, again his spirits rose, for all sat listening to him with wrapt attention. With the extinction of the fire his narrative came to an end. Of the events of the morning he said nothing.

“How brave you must be!” said his mother admiringly. Not that Henry had boasted of his doings. He had simply related all that had taken place. “The very sight of the flames would have taken all my brains away,”—which was no doubt true enough.

“I must say I am glad,” Letitia observed. “Just as she was going to step into her grandeur, to be baffled in this way! It shows, I think——”

“Letitia!” Henry cried in a tone of disgust.

“But I will speak. I say it shows

on whose side the elements are. But how did it happen? Who did it—or who is supposed to have done it?"

"I am," Henry said, - shortly and bitterly.

"You!" with a scream, in which even his father joined, laying down the book he held, in his surprise.

"They choose to say so. And if people choose to say a thing in this world, they will say it. That I have learnt. It is no more use to talk to the world than it is to preach a sermon on Algebra in Bedlam. I will tell you what they say;" and, unable to control his excitement, he again, with eagerness, made a narrative of the unfortunate visit he had paid to Nora's room.

“I don’t say it is quite impossible,” he concluded. “I suppose it is just within the limits of possibility, and so it must be left. It was a most unfortunate accident to happen to anybody ; but I really hardly see how it could have been helped.”

“Are you sure it was an accident?” said Mr. Devereux, looking at him with cold scrutiny.

Henry stared—stared so ludicrously, so totally without understanding what his father meant to say, that Letitia burst out laughing.

“Oh ! papa, no. How can you imagine such a thing ? You might have done it, and would, I believe, with great pleasure ; but Henry would not—Henry could not.”

“Could not, indeed !” he cried fiercely,

as he saw the meaning. "Who dares say such things?"

"Nobody. At least, *I* say you could not do it. You would have been burning your own heart and hope and future home. There would have been no sense in it."

He rose up with an impatient, impetuous movement. Less than ever could he bear that imputation. He would at the moment almost have taken the suggestion of his father to escape from it.

"A pleasant place this is to come to!" he cried, as he rose; and banging the door, he left the room.

Mr. Devereux took up his book. Letitia continued to laugh. Mrs. Devereux sat uneasily. She was thinking of Henry's comfort, and longing to get to him.

“I wonder if Henry expected dinner?” she said at last.

“He may expect it in vain,” replied her husband, “for he will not have it at home.”

“No,” she said; “and so I think I had better tell him. If he wants dinner he had better go and get it.”

Mr. Devereux made no objection, and she left the room. This was the cleverest thing Mrs. Devereux had ever done in her life. It was a little plan to get to Henry, and it was successful.

She found him helping the housemaid to put his room to rights. As soon as that loud bell rang, guessing, as well as Letitia, whose it was, the faithful housemaid had flown to make it ready; and by dint of good will, and assistance from the nurse and the cook, it was,

when he came up, no longer quite as it had lately been, the family lumber-room. While he helped, he was making a variety of droll observations, and he received his mother with perfect good temper.

She found that he had dined, and that a cup of tea would satisfy him. This she got him with her own hands, and sat down with him while he drank it; and, recurring again to her admiration for his bravery, soothed his ruffled spirit, and received from him at parting one of those embraces she prized so dearly.

After breakfast the following morning Henry pursued his father as he was leaving the house to communicate the fact that he had thrown up his appointment under Nora. He felt cowardly

about making the communication. The elation of mind had given place to an unpleasant sensation that perhaps he had acted hastily, and like a fool.

His father's words, however—his cool contempt—his compliment to Henry on his superlative wisdom, sufficed to rouse his spirit again; and with the same dignity with which he had explained his motives to Nora, he laid them before his father. A man who was watched with suspicion could not properly perform the duties of an overseer of others. This was his apology, and the dignity and warmth with which he spoke were not assumed. He felt from his heart what he said. He might not have acted as a wise man; but conscientiousness, if nothing else, was written on his face, and heard in his explanation.

His father looked at him, and something like the passion of curiosity might have been seen in his impassive face. Henry's desire to do his duty to Nora was altogether beyond his power to understand.

Of his curiosity, however, he said nothing. After a moment he observed,

"It was no will of mine, to have you take such a situation; but it is still less my will to have you throw it up like a fool. How do you propose to earn your bread in future?"

"By my own exertions," Henry said, with a glow in his cheek. "I am no longer the same man; I have been tried, and I know what I can do. Miss Smith will bear witness that I can work, nor do I suppose Mr. Powderham himself would deny it."

“Does it never strike you that you have damaged your reputation by your hasty conduct; that you have done the very thing to expose yourself to suspicion.”

“To the suspicion of what?” asked Henry, with sharpness.

“Of having voluntarily set fire to Miss Smythe’s house!” his father said slowly, fixing his eyes upon him.

“Of being an incendiary!” Henry cried, in his violent manner, the blood of all the Devereux, counting from the one whom he fondly loved to consider an ancestor, swelled to bursting in his veins.

“Even so,” replied his father, crossing his arms, and smiling a bitter smile. “Are you sure there was no lingering

hope of such a result in the lucifer that was thrown away?"

"If you were not my father you should not dare——" Henry cried passionately, and he flung out of the room.

As he crossed the hall, stamping off to his own regions, Letitia opened the drawing-room door and called to him.

"I was watching for you," she said. "Do come in here and talk a little. Our house is not so lively that I am not glad of a change."

He paused a moment; then remarking her face, which indeed looked pale and dreary enough, his wrath evaporated in good-nature.

"What is the matter?" she said, as he followed her into the room, and she saw his flushed countenance.

"Nothing, except that I think the

world is infested by a plague of demons."

"There I agree with you;" and she spoke more soothingly than usual. "But let the demons rest for a while. I want to talk. I want to hear about things. What sort of a place is it down there? Come, do talk. I have not spoken to a rational being for this month past, and I am very glad to have you back."

Henry's nature was one which was affected by a word of love or kindness. There may be a little vanity in the composition that is thus easily pleased, yet the larger ingredient is affectionateness of nature. He was gratified at his sister's expression of pleasure in his society, and he came further into the room, and very amiably answered the few ques-

tions she carelessly put, about the house at Riddlemere and the sort of scenery around it. He had been interested by the wild country, and scarcely observing how careless her inquiries were, he entered heartily into the subject.

“Well, and how did you get on with the work?” she then inquired, with more zest. “Was it hard?”

“Not the least hard. Very interesting.”

Letitia laughed.

“Why laugh? If you think I don’t like work, Letitia, you utterly and entirely misunderstand me. I am as sick of idleness as you are of staring out of that window.”

“And that is saying a good deal. Well, don’t be angry, Henry. You know I have yet to learn your new character.

I did not mean to offend. And so you got on well—found it all easy?”

“There was nothing in my work that I could not do with proper attention. I should never have had any bother at all, if it had not been for the people I had to deal with; and luckily I had not very much to say to them.”

“What people?”

“Mr. Powderham and that James Field. They are enough to put an angel into a tantarum. I defy a plain, honest man to live with them in peace.”

He was becoming excited, but in the midst of his excitement a faint blush on his sister's cheek opened his blind eyes to the cause of her questioning. He paused, and then said,

“If you hoped I should become friends

with James Field, Letitia, you hoped wrong. It is a thing that could not be. He is not a gentleman."

"What do you mean by a gentleman?" she asked.

"Nothing to do with birth or fortune. I have seen down there—among the navvies, even, and much more among the country-people—men whose feelings and manners would have done honour to princes. But James Field is not a gentleman."

"I suppose you quarrelled, if the truth was known."

"No, we did not quarrel. I did not allow myself to quarrel. Once or twice, when his insolence was more than I could bear, we had words; but we are on as friendly terms now as we were on the first day we met."

“And that is on no friendly terms at all.”

“Well, I don’t pretend to be a friend. I don’t like him, and I never shall ; and I warn you against him, Letitia.”

“I want no warning,” she said, petulantly. “I had better warn you. Take care that he does not cut you out in Miss Smythe’s affections. You have left him the field all to himself.”

“Cut me out !” he began, ever roused at that idea ; then muttering only, “a pretty home this is to come to !” he left the room with his usual slam.

Letitia laughed ; but then sighed ; and the worn, harassed look returned to her face. She was an odious girl, but she had excuses. The dreariness of her life

had embittered her mind. Few sought her; none loved her as they had sought and loved Henry, and she lived and breathed only the cold dull atmosphere of her own home.

One person had seemed to seek her, and to him such heart as she had had been yielded. By occasional meetings with him, secret, not so much in the outward form of meeting as in the motives which inspired them to seek each other, a certain excitement had been given to her life. This was now over, and a vague hope, vague and with few illusions about it, was all that was left her. She had hoped to hear some pleasant words from Henry. She had hoped he and Henry might have become friends. The hope was disappointed. She clung to her one dream in

spite of what Henry said ; yet she felt his words ; she knew dimly that he was right, and her one soft feeling was a bitter one.

CHAPTER XVI.

“**W**HAT is to be done now, Miss Willis?” Nora cried. She had been sitting for a long time in reflection after Mr. Powderham’s departure.

Miss Willis had one resource for all troubles, and she began—

“If Mr. Stephen Fanshawe were here ——”

“I had already thought of him,” Nora said, “but it is impossible. Something must be done to-night. Do you not see? I do not think a trial could prove anything; but a character may be destroyed by it for ever. I think I

will go to Mr. Lubbock myself. You will come with me. He will perhaps be home for dinner; I will go at six, and try to speak to him. What do you think?"

As there was no point of conscience, Miss Willis gave a ready acquiescence. She was as anxious as Nora was to prevent such a public disclosure; and although she looked on Henry as a hair-brained young man, she could not easily believe him a guilty one. Before the time of departure came, however, her confidence in his innocence was slightly shaken. Mrs. Ratcliffe came to her room to tell her in confidence that there were strange stories about Henry afloat; that it appeared he had never made any secret of his hate to Miss Smith, and that people were beginning to suspect

that the fire had been an act of revenge.

When a number of people, rich or poor, in city or country, talk over a mysterious matter, the same thing occurs; there are truths and falsehoods, exaggerations and mistakes. There is therefore no need to relate the stories that had been made up regarding Henry, and which, now poured into Mrs. Ratcliffe's ear, had at last upset her confidence in him. She was so shocked at the one fact—his having called Miss Smith his enemy in the hearing of two workmen whom she knew and trusted, and who, with mysterious shakes of the head, now reported the speech—that she was almost ready to believe anything, and, as has been said, her doubts in some degree upset the mind of Miss Willis also.

She told Mrs. Ratcliffe, however, that Mr. Powderham had already mentioned the report, and advised that nothing further should be said. "Miss Smith was harassed enough," she said. "Do not let us add to her anxiety."

"Well, I won't," replied Mrs. Ratcliffe, "though I did feel I could have gone and hanged him with my own hands. And I won't tell Sophy either; for the poor child is ill, and does fret so after him, I don't know what to do with her; she says it's a shame to be angry about an accident. And so it is, if it was an accident. Well, please God it will turn out so, for I never was so deceived. Never."

Except with two or three, Henry had been very popular; but few stand by their friends as friends should. Nor is

it altogether from fickleness; there is always that terrible dread of having been deceived.

Late in the day Miss Willis accompanied Nora to Squire Lubbock's. She had been correct in her views regarding him. When she reached his house at six o'clock she found that he had just returned to dinner.

She sent up her name and begged to be allowed to speak to him.

Squire Lubbock was an honest, unrefined country gentleman, giving his heart as well as his time to the common business of a country gentleman. He was an active magistrate and a strict one; but a favourite, because just and kind-hearted. Though somewhat unrefined, he had a respect that was almost chivalrous, not only for youth and beauty, not only for a lady,

but for every woman that was neatly dressed ; and that he had not the same respect for all women, was because he was firmly possessed with the idea that every proper woman ought to be neatly dressed, could be neatly dressed if she pleased ; and if not neatly dressed, was not a woman according to his ideas.

There was a homely gallantry and courtesy about him when he came down at Nora's summons ; and he assisted her from the carriage, handed her into his house, and asked what he could do for her, with an evident desire to do it, whatever it were.

In one way these courteous manners helped her ; gave her confidence, and made her task easy. But in another way it made it more difficult. It made her suddenly feel that Henry was a young man, and that her motives might be misunderstood. This

was only a passing reflection, however. The next instant she cast it aside, and made known her business.

She told her story with truth, courage, and quietness; showed where she thought the evidence of premeditated intention broke down; and then touched on her reasons for wishing to bury the finding of the letter in oblivion.

Mr. Lubbock heard her with great interest and attention. When she had done he said,

“Of course I must hear what Mr. Powderham has to say; but, to relieve your mind, I will tell you that I so far agree with you. It chanced that I saw Mr. Devereux on the day after the fire. He came here to give evidence in favour of a poor man; and though I must allow that he appears to be an impa-

tient, passionate-tempered young gentleman, yet, unless men's countenances err more than I suspect they do, I should acquit him of all malignant intentions. We must remember the letter is *to* him, not from him ; that makes a great difference. Passionate speeches are very bad, but they show passion, not malignity ; *that* is a great difference. Unless the case is very much worse than I imagine it is, let me promise you that you shall not be forced to prosecute against your will."

His manners became still more respectful and courteous after he had heard her ; and when he handed her back into her carriage, she felt that he was a friend who would stand by her.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. POWDERHAM paid his visit to Mr. Lubbock on the following morning; and his feelings may be imagined when he found that he had been forestalled.

Mr. Lubbock immediately informed him of Nora's visit, and stated plainly the opinion he had formed from her account, but observed that possibly many things had escaped her observation.

Now, there is something depressing in such an opening. A man speaking of free will can make an oration with great spirit, and give effect to small and incidental circum-

stances. This was what Mr. Powderham had intended to do. But to be told to state a case is a very different thing. The very words are freezing, and the small circumstances become stiff as wire in the fingers.

Mr. Powderham did state his case, but he was conscious that he did it badly. He was a clever man, but not so clever that he was not liable to be put out. He was much put out on this occasion, and he knew he made a poor exhibition of his powers.

Mr. Lubbock, after listening to him attentively, shook his head.

“There is even less than I expected,” he said. “I think if you were to bring so lame a case before a jury they would laugh at you.”

Laugh at Mr. Powderham ! A thrill of

rage against this laughing jury ran through his veins. It stirred him up; it put spirit into his blood.

“I perceive,” he said, “that we look on this matter from two points of view. You have made up your mind that Mr. Devereux is innocent. I, on the contrary, however little I may be able to make the evidence complete, know him to be guilty.”

This was true. Without hearing Nora, Mr. Lubbock, from long habit of judging of men's countenances, would have decided that Henry was innocent. Mr. Powderham, though he had been long in coming to the opinion, did now believe him to be guilty. And from the peculiar formation of his mind, which attached itself with bands of iron to

every opinion it adopted, he was bound to this opinion. It was adopted; and he was prepared to do his duty towards it at any cost.

He left Mr. Lubbock, angry, not cast down; uncertain how to act, but determined to act.

Mr. Lubbock had refused to force a prosecution on Nora. As to an investigation, that, he said, was as Mr. Powderham thought best. He would only advise him to be very guarded. It seemed impossible to prove a malicious intent; many circumstances appeared rather to disprove anything like premeditation. On the other hand, it was impossible for Mr. Devereux, if asked to do so, to disprove what he had *thought*; and a young man's character might be tainted for ever.

“It is easy to take away a character, Mr. Powderham; not so easy in this world to give it back again.”

So Squire Lubbock concluded, and with a hearty laugh, which was his habit even when no laugh was required.

Mr. Powderham drove home in his little gig, with James Field. Field had accompanied him to Mr. Lubbock's, to answer questions, should that gentleman have been disposed to take the matter in hand.

Mr. Powderham, having in a degree admitted him to his confidence, did not scruple, after repeating what had passed, to express an opinion that Squire Lubbock was an ass. Having said this, he felt relieved; anger passed from his mind, and he was able to consider what should be done.

“Does anything strike you, sir, in this business?” James Field began hesitatingly. “I feel sure it must.”

“A great many things strike me, Field. But may I ask to what you particularly allude?”

“I mean with regard to Miss Smith’s conduct in this matter; the motive that guides her.” He paused; then, not being sure he was understood, added quickly, “The unfortunate attachment she shows. I feel sure it has not escaped you.”

This was the way in which he played on Mr. Powderham’s little weakness. He put his own ideas into his mind, and then considered them as *his*.

On the previous day, when Mr. Powderham had asked that question of Nora about her unwillingness, the idea had shot through his mind for an instant. He was

able, therefore, to reply with truth and gravity,

“Well, yes, Field, I own something of the kind has struck me.”

He looked very serious over it.

“I thought it must strike you. I am glad it has done so, for it is not for me in my position here to allude to such things.”

“You are quite right.”

“At the same time,” continued James Field, “my relationship to Miss Smith, and the strong interest I take in her affairs, compels me to be anxious. It is no doubt a motive common to young ladies; one, indeed, which we might expect to find in her as in others, were it not that she seems superior in intellect to the majority——”

“I am not sure of that, Field!” Mr. Powderham interrupted to say.

“I daresay I mistake. The deference you, sir, have shown her is the cause of the opinion I formed.”

“She has a strong will ; but that is perfectly compatible with the common weakness of her sex.”

“Then I think you have her motive, and I confess it grieves me to think of the comments that will be made.”

“You fear that she will be supposed to shield Mr. Devereux from motives of unworthy partiality ; from love, in short.”

“Something of the sort has been breathed in my ear, sir. Our workmen are a rough lot, and speak as they think, without regard to our notions of delicacy. Now, sir, we have no means of governing this class of

men but by justice in our dealings. If their feelings on this point are aggravated, they take to Chartist ideas, and even Miss Smith's property may not be safe."

"Very true. The case is this. Either they will think lightly of the crime, seeing a gentleman is shielded from the consequences; or else they will be aggravated, speak of class against class, and so become dangerous."

"Exactly, sir."

They drove along in silence. Mr. Powderham was reflecting.

"I have been considering the matter, Field," he said at last, "and I think it *is* a case in which I ought to interfere. I will go to Miss Smith. When she sees the reasons in favour of an investigation, when she hears what unworthy motives

are imputed to her, she will consent to act."

They trotted along to Riddlemere without more conversation. Mr. Powderham there left his gig, and walked slowly towards the house. When he came to think of it, he found what he had to say more difficult than he had thought in the beginning. He was not afraid of Nora—oh! no; but there was at times something in her ways which made him cower. As he went over his conversation—the conversation that was about to be held—he found that to go and inform a young lady to her face that she was supposed to be in love with a person who had been acting as her agent, and who had misbehaved himself, was not an agreeable errand. His pace slackened, and he cast about in his mind for a variety of delicate phrases by which,

without seeming to do so, he might convey to her what he wished to say.

At last a bright thought flashed on his mind. It was this : he would make his communication to Miss Willis. He would make a third person understand what he meant. He had not hitherto noticed Miss Willis. With the politeness of a gentleman, he had bowed to her on entering and leaving the room, but she had been a nonentity in his eyes. At this moment she became a person of importance, and he quickened his pace, walked to the door, and asked if she was at home.

The servant seemed surprised, but answered yes, and was despatched with a message to request a few moments' conversation.

Miss Willis, who was writing in her room,

was much more surprised, but hastened down obediently to attend to him.

Mr. Powderham entered upon his business at once. He felt no fears of Miss Willis, and the anxious attention with which she listened to him inspired, and made him eloquent. He set the whole case before her very well and very forcibly; drew a picture of the evils to be dreaded; his fears for Nora's welfare; his fears for her delicacy; his fears for the morals of the navvies; and his fears for the effect of screening delinquents on the public in general. All he said was very true, and he was so much in earnest, that all he said was convincing.

Miss Willis was carried away by him. She was horror-struck. The morals of the navvies, and the welfare of the public did

not indeed affect her much ; but her sensitive feminine nature shrank in horror at the suspicion of Nora's secret attachment ; at the idea of her feelings being canvassed ; at the idea of such a motive being imputed. Breathlessly she repelled the imputation, and equally breathlessly declared herself ready to do her best to point out to Nora the necessity of so acting as to repel it in her own person.

Mr. Powderham took his leave on this assurance, promising to return on the following morning ; and so satisfied was he with Miss Willis and her deference, that, had there not been already a Mrs. Powderham with whom he was satisfied, he would have bestowed that place upon her at once.

Miss Willis went up stairs, not slowly but breathlessly, to the sunny drawing-room

where Nora sat. Had she allowed herself to go slowly, some of the difficulties in her way might have presented themselves to her mind; but she was too much excited to allow time for thought, and she hurried up with her message bursting from her lips.

She was so eager to have the one charge repelled, that she gave little thought to any other part of the subject; no thought at all to the wording of the message. It came bursting out; first her fears that Nora *must* act against her will, and secondly the reason why. It was just as well that she allowed no time for thought, for she spoke more forcibly in her excitement than she would have done with preparation, and brought before Nora the evil that had to be dreaded in a strong light.

Nora began to listen with something of defiance in her air; but when the charge

was understood she quivered. A blush, not

“Celestial rosy red, Love’s proper hue,”

but purple in its tint, dyed her cheeks and brow. It rose and faded, leaving her as pale as she had been flushed; and all the while that this ebbing and flowing was going on, she sat silent and immovable.

Miss Willis, after one glance of sympathetic feeling, averted her eyes. She grieved for the wounded modesty, so plainly betrayed by the flushed countenance; and beginning to consider the words she had used, was herself ready to sink into the earth at the thought of what she had done.

She wondered what was to come next,

and began to consider how to show her own utter disbelief in the charge.

But before she had gathered up her ideas, Nora raised her head and spoke.

“This is a terrible charge, Miss Willis,” she said.

Her tone was ironical and haughty, but calm and composed. No air of wounded modesty—no averting of her eyes.

It was a tone so different from what had been expected, that Miss Willis had not power to take in the new impressions it gave, and she replied—

“It is;” and then added, “nothing would have made me the medium of giving you this pain, but the conviction that it was best you should know what was said.”

“Oh! yes, it is best to know everything.”

The tone of her voice was so strangely

cold, that Miss Willis became perplexed, and remained silent.

“And what is to be done now?” Nora asked, in the same manner. “Has Mr. Powderham arranged any plan by which this terrible charge is to be met?”

“Only what he before mentioned. He wishes you to let the matter be investigated. It is your backwardness which has given rise to these comments.”

She gasped, feeling guilty while she spoke her daring words.

“I understand,” Nora said. “In fear of what may be said of *me*, I am to be driven to prosecute an innocent man. Is that it, Miss Willis?”

“No, surely not exactly,” Miss Willis said hurriedly; but she was beginning to be abashed, to lose her clear thoughts on the subject—to lose her head, in short.

“Is it not? It seems to me that I have stated the case *exactly*. Well, Miss Willis, you may give this answer. They may say of me what they please. I will *not* do it; I will not do an unjust act from any selfish reason whatever. Fortunately perhaps for me,”—but here a sigh came, and her tone softened—“I am so accustomed to be suspected and misunderstood, that the world’s opinion has little influence over me. When will you give Mr. Powderham my message?” she asked suddenly.

“He will not return till to-morrow.”

“Well, come when he may, there it is ready for him. And you, Miss Willis,”—and she fixed her piercing eyes upon the poor thing till she cowered before them,—“is it possible you thought I

would consent to act thus? Could *you* misunderstand me?"

"I hardly know." Tears came into Miss Willis's eyes. "You look on it in so different a light. I felt ready to drop with shame, and did not consider that it might be unjust. Forgive me. I admire your courage."

Nora said no more; and after arranging her papers leisurely, left the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUT the calm outside, and the air of disdain, was an unfaithful picture of the heart within.

Nora went slowly upstairs, lingering as she went, as if dreading to be face to face with herself. But when her door closed, and she stood with no eye upon her, the dreadful secret that had been dragged into light met her and glared upon her.

For days and days she had been keeping it at bay. She had refused to question the meaning of the new, strange, torturing feelings that assailed her. She had said "It was bitter to be hated,"

but had repelled what might have been added—to be hated where she loved. But the truth came forth now, and would not be denied utterance.

She loved him. He who scorned and hated her had been able to lure her heart away; he whom she could neither esteem nor respect had won her; he whom she had been endeavouring—in simple benevolence, as she supposed—to befriend, had been like the strong man; he had broken in and taken her dearest treasure, her self-respect, away.

The idea was torture. She crushed her fingers into the palms of her hands to stay the rush of thought; but thoughts and bitter fancies would not be stayed until this first agony was replaced by a reflection which for the moment was bitterer still.

A proud spirit can bear its agony, but can scarcely bear the agony of men's eyes upon its pain. She was found out. Her agents, her servants, were talking over her, were pitying her for her misplaced love. The feelings inspired by this picture, when it presented itself before her, may be imagined. Shame overpowered her; the demon of wounded pride took possession of her. Her recent decision was forgotten. How to hide her shame, how to deceive, how best to repel the charge, became the subject of her thoughts.

There seemed but one way—to allow Mr. Powderham to do what he wished—coldly and calmly to suffer them to persecute Henry as they pleased. Something of a glad relief came over her when she thought of having this remedy in her power.

It was a moment of exceeding bitterness ; it was a moment in which, unless God sent some good angel to save them, many women have cast the peace of their life away for ever.

But a good angel came to Nora, and saved her from herself.

It was in the form of a poor woman. A message was brought to her that a woman called Hannah Barlow wished to speak to her.

Her door was locked, and, glancing at her crimson cheeks in the glass, she answered with unaccustomed sharpness that she was unable to see her. But the sound of her sharp voice grated on her ears, and in moving, her eye fell on a fine print of one of Raphael's fair and calm Madonnas. The contrast of this holy face to her own crimsoned cheeks and agitated appearance struck

her—as will sometimes strangely happen—with vivid force ; and she flew to the door and arrested the departing footsteps by “No, James, beg her to wait. I will see her in five minutes.”

And, having cooled and calmed the outward rather than the inward man, she went down in search of her.

The woman, Hannah Barlow, was the wife of the man who had been falsely accused, and whom Henry had saved from committal for trial. Most of the workmen employed about the house were navvies, but some of the higher sort belonged to the place, and this was one. The woman was in great distress. Although the case had been discharged by the magistrate, the accusation lived on. The man was not popular, and his companions said the discharge had been a job—“one of that Mr.

Devereux's jobs," and his life was not worth having with their taunts. She came to beg Nora to speak to Squire Lubbock. What he could do she did not know, but he *must* do something to prove her husband's innocence ; to re-establish his character in the eyes of the world.

The story excited Nora's mind, and she listened attentively, and entered eagerly into the question what could be done.

"The best might be to write to the young gentleman," the woman said. "*He* knew he was innocent. But then he was in a peck of trouble himself she understood, and perhaps after all Squire Lubbock might be more listened to just now. "It's all lies they say of him," she said. "I beg pardon, my lady, for speaking, but it's all lies just as much as the tales against my poor man. The world is a pack of liars. Why now, my

lady, do you think if he'd been up to such a dreadful deed that he would have gone with my poor man that day? Why, he was as vexed to go, John says, as if he was to be hanged himself, and was well-nigh in a terrible passion because Squire Lubbock kept him waiting; because, you see, he wanted to meet you, my lady, after the terrible accident; but for all that he wouldn't leave my poor man in the lurch. What's a little bit of passion? He had his passions no doubt, and so has my poor man; but I'd rather have a good passion now and again, than I'd have folks creeping about with a saint's smile on their lips and a serpent in their hearts."

Nora could have embraced the woman as with eager, grateful ears she drank in her words. She promised in some way to have her husband reinstated in his proper place

in public opinion, and when she left her and returned to her own room, it was in an altered frame of mind.

Tears fell down her cheeks, but they were soft tears. Henry was not, could not be unworthy of her love. He might hate her; he did hate her, that she knew; but he might have been brought up to it. He was not altogether unworthy. The poor woman evidently loved him; and so might she, and not be ashamed. Her tears fell down—tears of humiliation, and self-pity, and repentance; but the bitterness was past.

She roused herself from these reflections to consider how she was to act. Her position was become difficult. That revelation of her secret heart made it difficult. No more fearless acting. She

shuddered as she thought of her visit to Mr. Lubbock; and although she had promised, shrank from bringing herself under his notice again. Every step seemed bold and unmaidenly. The weakest girl scarcely gives her heart unsought, and yet *she* had done so. Trust and self-confidence and self-respect were gone, and she was afraid.

In the course of the afternoon she was called down to Mr. and Mrs. Elliott. The accusation against Henry had only reached their ears that morning. At a meeting of gentry at the Spa, it had been mentioned to Mr. Elliott. The mere fact of the accusation was told as a bit of gossip, but there was an evident belief in its truth.

Mr. Elliott was in a state of mingled wrath and mirth, and had insisted on being

driven over to Riddlemere, a thing, as he told Nora, that had not happened for twenty years.

“He considers a drive in a barouche in the light of a purgatory,” said his wife, laughing; “nevertheless his anxiety for the fame of Henry Devereux made him submit to it.”

“Anxiety! Not a bit of it!” he cried. “It’s the fun of the thing! Why, he’s no more capable of carrying out such a plot than an infant in arms. Let him call me as a witness; I’ll tell them what I think. If they ask me if he set fire to the house, ‘Yes, gentlemen,’ I should say, ‘he’s a youth with so few brains that I never sleep in peace in my house when he’s there; a youth who reads a novel in bed, and tilts up a candle on his pillow; but as to plotting to burn a house out of

hate, he couldn't do it. He couldn't do it any more than a wild colt could do it.' I'll be hanged if the folly of the world is not enough to make one sick."

The mists and clouds that had been enveloping Nora for some days blew away. It was like morning light after a bad dream. She wondered what all the misery had been about, and shook herself free from it with a thrill of delight.

It is true that the happier mood was a little disturbed when Mr. Elliott, having asked to see the letter he had heard about, read it.

"It's the devil's own writing," he cried forcibly, and remained silent while he read it over a second time.

The more mirthful view of the subject then returned, and he said,

"But if the devil chooses to write to a

man, what can the man do but what Henry did?—throw the letter on the floor!”

His desire, however, to satisfy his curiosity regarding the whole subject made him, when Nora consulted him about the affair of the poor man, catch at the idea of seeing Mr. Lubbock. He and Mrs. Elliott would drive her to Mr. Lubbock's, and return home by a shorter way. She could have her carriage to meet her.

As Mr. Elliott was subject to rheumatism, and it was already late, Mrs. Elliott offered some remonstrances against the plan; but he observed, with wisdom, drawn perhaps from experience,

“If I was driven there against my will, I should certainly have my rheumatics; but if I go with my will, rheumatics won't dare to come.”

Mr. Lubbock, although most chivalrously

desirous to attend to Nora's wishes, was yet unable to promise much help to the man Barlow. But he made some observations which were useful to her in another way.

“Let him live the accusation down,” he said. “It is not a rapid remedy, but it is a sure one. And if he would permit me, that is the advice I would give to Mr. Devereux also. He is in this same trouble. Let him live the accusation down. He knows his own innocence; let him scorn all false imputations—trample them under his feet. Men must not be milksops. They must learn to bear, as the best of men have borne, evil report as well as good report.”

These observations occupied Nora on her way homewards, and stilled her, both as regarded Henry and herself. Tongues were

making free with both their names. Let them both live the accusation down ; both go steadfastly on their way, not scorning, but not overmuch heeding the malicious speeches of men. . The lesson, in short, that she took to herself was to have patience, that hardest lesson to learn ; to wait and see—to wait and trust—to beware of fierce passions ; the impetuous impulses of a discomposed mind.

On her return home, she found that Mr. Powderham had called again to know her decision.

Now, to do him justice, had that decision been to place the matter in his hands he intended to be very lenient. Fully expecting that such would be the case, he had considered, as he returned to Riddlemere, how he should act, so as to satisfy justice and yet please her ;

and several half formed schemes were in his head.

But he was not to have the matter in his hands. Nora withstood him, Mr. Lubbock withstood him, and even Miss Willis, who that very morning had been a soft piece of wax in his fingers, gently yet firmly told him that on further thought she believed Nora was right to pay no attention to ill-natured remarks.

He was deeply wounded. So vain a man could not but be wounded to find himself baffled by a girl. He was on his way to dine with a friend, and had called at Riddlemere in cheerful spirits, intending only to have his anxiety set at rest. As he recrossed the court to re-enter his gig his steps were slow. He tried to think what course to pursue, but was too angry and disappointed to be able to

think as readily as usual. Henry must and should feel his displeasure ; must and should know the dreadful suspicions which were entertained against him. How should he act ?

While slowly walking, James Field saw him and joined him.

“Is anything to be done, sir?”

“Nothing.” He spoke sharply, angry at having to confess so much.

“Nothing at all, sir? I think it an extremely ill-judged decision.”

“So do I, Field, for the matter of that. I do not say, however, that I shall do nothing. I was speaking of Miss Smith’s decision.”

“I understand, sir. Well, sir,” he added mildly, “the decision may be wrong, but perhaps it is a natural one. It appears to me—but no doubt you have al-

ready decided on your course of action."

"Not quite. I was at that moment considering how best to satisfy my own conscience and public opinion in the matter. To pass over the whole affair seems monstrous."

"It appears to me, sir, that the end you have in view may be simply attained by ascribing the passing over of the transaction to Miss Smith's kind forbearance. It will be sufficient here, and it may be sufficient also with Mr. Devereux. If you, sir, were to send him a statement of the whole case, with the evidence against him, making known to him, as to others, what kind influence had prevailed to shield him, the effect would be—but I need not say more, you had probably thought of something of the kind."

“Partly. Not altogether. Yes, Field, I think your suggestion a proper one. I will act upon it to-night. Be good enough to make another copy of Mr. Devereux’s letter, and send it to my house by a messenger. I shall be home early.”

He had not intended to be home early, but as he drove along he wrote a letter in his imagination—so lofty, so majestic, so soothing to his own wounded pride, and so telling to Henry, that he was in a fever until he could write it down and send it off. After going a short distance, the fever to write became predominant, the friend’s dinner was forsaken, he turned his horse’s head and trotted home, calling for a copy of the letter in his way. The letter was written and dispatched that night.

Mr. Powderham was not a cruel man.

In all the domestic relations of life, what are called its charities, he was a kind-hearted, amiable man; but at this moment he not only wrote a cruel letter, but he intended it to be so—to be so to a certain degree. He had his views of his duty, and did not wish to go a step beyond; but he certainly did wish to administer privately to Henry a little of that just rebuke which the public had been prevented from expressing. This was the letter:—

“SIR,

“On the morning of your departure—your ill-advised departure—from the scene of this disastrous fire, certain reports concerning you arose. They were reports of a very unpleasant nature. In no long time they reached my ear, and you may

imagine the amazement, and I will add the incredulity, with which at first I heard them. Such was my amazement, that it was not until I had laid the facts of the case before a legal friend, and seen the effect of those facts on his mind, that my incredulity gave way to conviction. My opinion is now formed, and I have told you of my hesitation, that you may understand it was not formed hastily. That opinion is of a very serious character."

Mr. Powderham then made a short statement of the facts to which he had alluded, directed Henry's attention to the letter found and enclosed, made a few apt and moral reflections on the tone of the letter, and the general subject of passion and hate, and then proceeded :

"When suspicions which so seriously af-

fect the character of an individual are entertained, I, in my judgment, consider it the right of an Englishman to have an opportunity to defend himself. It was in this view that I expressed an opinion that it would be proper to summon you, to answer for yourself before competent judges. My opinion has been overruled. When the case was submitted to Miss Smith, she declined to give her consent to any measures which would make the investigation of a public character. The natural gentleness of the female character, together with her relations with your family, made her no doubt desirous to shield you from public rebuke. I bow to her decision. I consider it, however, my duty, as her agent and confidential adviser, to inform you of the suspicions entertained. Should you have any

means of disproving the reception of the letter, of denying the violent words reported to have been used, or in other ways of justifying yourself, it will of course be a satisfaction to all your friends ; among which, I beg of you to include, sir,

“Your obedient servant,

“HORATIUS POWDERHAM.”

For a day or two, Henry had been tossing about London. No other word so aptly expresses the state of his mind and feeling. Before the close of the day on which he had spoken to his father, the sense of his folly had replaced all other considerations in his mind. He became distracted as he thought of what he had so hastily given up ; distracted at having cut himself off from a future and more zealous discharge of his trust. He longed for Riddlemere, for the

sight of the building, for his wild rides over the heath, for his steady work in the office, with a longing that could be compared to that of a heart-sick exile. "Fool," he repeated with a stamp of the foot, a hundred times a day as he trod about the streets.

He could turn to no occupation. No theatre could allure him, no diversion amuse. Although distracted with anxiety, he endeavoured to put off thought, by repeating that it was useless to dwell on the future until he heard more about the past.

About the past! There was one sweet faint hope which every now and then intruded itself; and although not a calming one, for every vein palpitated when it was indulged, it was sweet. He fancied that when the excitement of the moment had passed by, and the fire began to be forgotten—when Nora saw all he had done,

and heard the cottagers talk of him—his value would come to be acknowledged ; that she would perhaps invite, perhaps implore him to return.

A little vanity, and an honest sense that he had done well, aided this dream ; and while it floated before him, the stamping would cease and softness relax his features.

But no sooner did he suffer the dream to get hold of him, no sooner yield himself to its influence, than a blighting apparition of James Field, accompanied by Mr. Powderham, would float between the dream and him. What might they not say of him ! Why had he left his reputation in their hands ! And as these reflections arose, the stamping and the tossing about were renewed.

It was on the fourth morning, and it was

in this mood of mind, that Mr. Powderham's letter was received.

Its effect was all—nay, far more than Mr. Powderham had anticipated or wished.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





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